

# CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

Table of Contents, updated language, and additional footnotes

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Machen's own words about this book: "In my little book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 1923, I tried to show that the issue in the Church of the present day is not between two varieties of the same religion. At its bottom, it is between two essentially different types of thought and life. There is much that connects the branches, but the two tendencies, Modernism and supernaturalism, or non-doctrinal religion and historic Christianity, spring from different roots. In particular, I tried to show that Christianity is not a "life," as distinguished from a doctrine. And it is not a life that has doctrine as its changing symbolic expression. It is the other way around. It is a life founded on a doctrine." (From "Christianity in Conflict," an autobiographical essay on Machen's life and works)

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this book is not to decide the religious issue of the present day, but merely to present the issue as sharply and clearly as possible, to aid the reader in deciding it for himself. Presenting an issue sharply is not a popular business at the present time. Many prefer to fight their intellectual battles in what Dr. Francis L. Patton aptly called a "condition of low visibility."<sup>1</sup> Clearly defining terms in religious matters, and bold-facing the logical implications of religious views, is regarded by many as impious. It may discourage contributions to mission boards, they say. It may hinder the progress of consolidation, or affect Church statistics. We cannot possibly agree. Light may seem an impertinent intruder at times, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion that rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or that shrinks from "controversial" matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life. In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things men agree about are apt to be the things least worth holding onto. The really important things are what men fight about.

In the sphere of religion, the present time is a time of conflict. The great redemptive religion known as Christianity is battling against a totally different type of religious belief. It undermines the Christian faith because it uses traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism." Both names are unsatisfactory. Liberalism, in particular, begs the question. It is regarded as "liberal" only by its friends. To its opponents, it

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<sup>1</sup> Francis L. Patton, in the introduction to William Hallock Johnson's *The Christian Faith Under Modern Searchlight*, [1916], p. 7.

seems narrow, ignoring many relevant facts. Indeed, the movement has such a variety of manifestations that one may despair of finding a common name for them all, but their root is the same. They are rooted in naturalism — that is, they deny that the origin of Christianity is found in the creative power of God. They believe it is found in the ordinary course of nature. The word "naturalism" is used in a sense somewhat different from its philosophical meaning. In this non-philosophical sense, it describes with fair accuracy the real root of what is called "liberal" religion. That may be a degradation of an originally noble word.

The rise of this modern naturalistic liberalism has not come by chance. It has been occasioned by important changes which have recently taken place in the conditions of life. The past one hundred years have witnessed the beginning of a new era in human history. It may be regretted, but it certainly cannot be ignored, even by the most obstinate conservatism. The change is not something that lies beneath the surface, visible only to the discerning eye. On the contrary, it forces itself upon us at a hundred points. Modern inventions, and the industrialism built upon them, have given us a new world to live in. We can no more remove ourselves from that world than we can escape from the atmosphere that we breathe.

But such changes in the material conditions of life do not stand alone. They have been produced by mighty changes in the human mind, which in their turn give rise to spiritual changes. The industrial world of today has been produced not by blind forces of nature, but by the conscious activity of the human spirit. It has been produced by the achievements of science. The outstanding feature of recent history is an enormous widening of human knowledge. This has gone hand in hand with such advancements in the instruments of investigation, that future progress in the material realm seems to scarcely have limits.

The application of modern scientific methods is almost as broad as the universe in which we live. Though the most palpable achievements are in the sphere of physics and chemistry, the sphere of human life cannot be isolated from the rest. And with the other sciences, there has appeared a modern science of history, for example. Along with psychology, sociology, and the like, it claims full equality with its sister sciences, even if it does not deserve it. No department of knowledge can maintain its isolation from the modern lust for scientific conquest. Inviolable treaties, though hallowed by all the sanctions of age-long tradition, are being flung ruthlessly to the winds.

In such an age, it is obvious that every inheritance from the past must be subject to searching criticism. As a matter of fact, some convictions of the human race have crumbled to pieces in the test. Indeed, the dependence of any institution on the past is now regarded as furnishing a presumption, not in favor of the institution, but against it. So many convictions have had to be abandoned, men sometimes believe that all convictions must go.

If such an attitude is justifiable, then no institution is faced by a stronger hostile presumption than the institution of the Christian religion. For no institution has based itself more squarely on the authority of a by-gone age. We are not inquiring whether such policy is wise or historically justifiable. The fact is plain that Christianity, during many centuries, consistently appealed to certain ancient books for the truth of its claims rather than current experience. The most recent of those books was written some nineteen hundred years ago. It is no wonder that its appeal is being criticized today. The writers of the books in question were no doubt men of their own age. Their outlook on the material world, judged by modern standards, must have been of the crudest and most elementary kind. The question inevitably arises whether the opinions of such men can ever

be normative for men of the present day. In other words, can first-century religion ever stand in company with twentieth-century science?

However the question may be answered, it presents a serious problem to the modern Church. Sometimes we try to make the answer easier than it appears. It is said that religion is so entirely separate from science, that the two cannot possibly come into conflict if they are rightly defined. I hope the following pages show that this attempt at separation is open to objections of the most serious kind. But what must now be observed is that, even if the separation is justifiable, it cannot be effected without effort. Removing the problem of religion and science itself constitutes a problem. Rightly or wrongly, religion has connected itself with a host of convictions over the centuries, especially in the sphere of history, a domain of scientific investigation. On the other hand, scientific investigators have sometimes attached themselves to conclusions which impinge upon the innermost domain of philosophy and religion.

For example, if an ordinary Christian were asked what would become of his religion should history prove that no man called Jesus ever lived and died in the first century, he would undoubtedly answer that his religion would fall away. Yet the investigation of events in the first century in Judea, just as much as in Italy or in Greece, belongs to the sphere of scientific history. In other words, our simple Christian, whether rightly or wrongly, and whether wisely or unwisely, has inseparably connected his religion to convictions that science also has a right to speak about. If those ostensibly religious convictions are not really religious at all, and belong to the sphere of science, then demonstrating that fact is no trifling task. Even if the problem of science and religion is just disentangling religion from pseudo-scientific accretions, the seriousness of the problem is not diminished by that. From every point of view, the problem in question is the most serious concern of the Church. What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture? May Christianity be maintained in a scientific age?

This is the problem which modern liberalism attempts to solve. Admitting that scientific objections to the particulars of the Christian religion may arise — against the Christian doctrines of the person of Christ, and redemption through His death and resurrection — the liberal theologian seeks to rescue certain general principles of religion. He thinks the particulars are mere temporary symbols, while he regards these general principles as "the essence of Christianity."

It may well be questioned whether this method of defense will really prove to be efficacious. After the apologist has abandoned his outer defenses to the enemy, and withdrawn into some inner citadel, he will probably discover that the enemy will pursue him even there. Modern materialism, especially in the realm of psychology, is not content with occupying the lower quarters of the Christian city. It pushes its way into all the higher reaches of life. It is as opposed to the philosophical idealism of the liberal preacher as it is to the Biblical doctrines that the liberal preacher has abandoned in the interests of peace. Making concessions, therefore, will never succeed in avoiding the intellectual conflict. In the intellectual battle of the present day, there can be no "peace without victory." One side or the other must win.

As a matter of fact, the figure just used may be altogether misleading. What the liberal theologian has retained, after abandoning one Christian doctrine after another to the enemy, may not be Christianity at all. It is a religion so entirely different from Christianity that it belongs in a distinct category. It may be that the fears of modern man concerning Christianity are entirely ungrounded. In abandoning the embattled walls of the city of God, he has fled in needless panic to the open

plains of a vague natural religion. He will only fall an easy victim to the enemy who always lies in ambush there.

Two lines of criticism are possible with respect to the liberal attempt at reconciling science and Christianity. Modern liberalism may be criticized (1) on the ground that it is un-Christian and (2) on the ground that it is unscientific. We shall concern ourselves here chiefly with the former line of criticism. We will show that, despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology, modern liberalism is not only a different religion from Christianity, but it belongs in a totally different class of religions. But in showing that the liberal attempt at rescuing Christianity is false, we are not showing that there is no way to rescue Christianity at all. On the contrary, it may appear incidentally, even in the present little book, that it is not the Christianity of the New Testament which is in conflict with science, but the supposed Christianity of the modern liberal Church. The real city of God, and that city alone, has defenses which are capable of warding off the assaults of modern unbelief. However, our immediate concern is with the other side of the problem. Our principal concern just now is to show that the liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity. What remains is, in its essentials, only that same indefinite type of religious aspiration that was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene. In trying to remove from Christianity everything that could possibly be objected to in the name of science, and in trying to bribe the enemy with those concessions that the enemy most desires, the apologist has really abandoned what he started out to defend. Here, as in many other departments of life, it appears that the things sometimes thought to be hardest to defend are also the things most worth defending.

In maintaining that liberalism in the modern Church represents a return to an un-Christian and sub-Christian form of religious life, we are particularly anxious not to be misunderstood. "Un-Christian" in such a connection is sometimes taken as a term of opprobrium. We do not mean that at all. Socrates was not a Christian; neither was Goethe. Yet we fully share the respect with which their names are regarded. They tower immeasurably above the common run of men. If the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than they, he is certainly not greater by any inherent superiority. He is greater by virtue of an undeserved privilege which ought to make him humble rather than contemptuous.

Such considerations, however, should not be allowed to obscure the vital importance of the question at issue. If all the preaching of the Church were controlled by the liberalism which has already become preponderant in many quarters, then we believe Christianity would at last have perished from the earth; the gospel would have sounded for the last time. If so, it follows that the inquiry with which we are now concerned is immeasurably the most important of all those questions with which the Church has to deal. The root question, as to what shall be preached, is vastly more important than all questions regarding our methods of preaching.

Many, no doubt, will impatiently turn from the inquiry — namely, all those who have settled the question in such a way that they cannot conceive of reopening it. These would include the pietists, for example. "What," they might say, "is the need to defend the Bible? Is it not the Word of God, and does it not contain an immediate certitude of its truth, which would only be obscured by such a defense? If science contradicts the Bible, so much the worse for science!" We have the highest respect for these persons, for we believe that they are right in the main point. They have arrived at their conviction by a direct and easy road, which other men attain only through intellectual struggle. But we cannot reasonably expect them to be interested in what we have to say.

Another class of uninterested persons is much more numerous. It consists of those who have definitely settled the question in the opposite way. They will soon fling aside this little book, if it ever comes into their hands, as only another attempt at defending a position already hopelessly lost. They will say that there are still individuals who believe that the earth is flat, just as there are individuals who will defend the Christianity of the Church with its miracles, atonement, and all. In either case, it will be said, the phenomenon is a curious example of arrested development, but nothing more.

However, closing the question this way, whether finally approved or not, is based upon a very imperfect view of the situation. It is based upon a grossly exaggerated estimate of the achievements of modern science. Scientific investigation, as already observed, has certainly accomplished much. In many respects it has produced a new world. But there is another aspect of the picture which should not be ignored. The modern world represents, in some respects, an enormous improvement over the world in which our ancestors lived. But in other respects, it exhibits a lamentable decline. The improvement appears in the physical conditions of life. But in the spiritual realm, there is a corresponding loss. The loss is clearest, perhaps, in the realm of art. Despite the mighty revolution produced in the external conditions of life, no great poet is now living to celebrate the change; humanity has suddenly become dumb. Gone, too, are the great painters, the great musicians, and the great sculptors. The art that subsists is largely imitative, and where it is not imitative it is usually bizarre. Even the appreciation of the glories of the past is gradually being lost. This results from the influence of a utilitarian education that concerns itself only with the production of physical well-being. The "Outline of History" by Mr. H. G. Wells, with its contemptuous neglect of all the higher ranges of human life, is a thoroughly modern book.

This unprecedented decline in literature and art is only one manifestation of a more far-reaching phenomenon. It is only one instance of that narrowing of the range of personality which has been going on in the modern world. The whole development of modern society has a mighty tendency toward limiting the realm of freedom for the individual man. This tendency is most clearly seen in socialism; a socialistic state reduces the sphere of individual choice to a minimum. Both labor and recreation would be prescribed under a socialistic government, and individual liberty would be gone. But the same tendency exhibits itself today even in those communities where the name of socialism is most abhorred. Once the majority has determined that a certain regime is beneficial, that regime is forced ruthlessly upon the individual man without further hesitation. It never seems to occur to modern legislatures that although "welfare" is good, *forced* welfare may be bad. In other words, utilitarianism is being carried out to its logical conclusions. In the interests of physical well-being, the great principles of liberty are being thrown ruthlessly to the winds.

The result is an unparalleled impoverishment of human life. Personality can only be developed in the realm of individual choice. And that realm, in the modern state, is being slowly but steadily contracted. The tendency is making itself felt in the sphere of education especially. The object of education, it is now assumed, is the production of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. But the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it is assumed further, can be defined only by the will of the majority. Therefore, it is said, idiosyncrasies in education must be avoided, and the choice of schools must be taken away from the individual parent and placed in the hands of the state. The state then exercises its authority through the instruments that are ready at hand, and at once. Therefore, the child is placed under the control of psychological experts, who are without the slightest acquaintance with the higher realms of human life. They proceed to prevent those who come under their care from gaining any such acquaintance. This result is being slightly

delayed in America by the remnants of Anglo-Saxon individualism. But the signs of the times are all contrary to maintaining this half-way position. Once its underlying principles have been lost, liberty will certainly hold a precarious tenure. For a time it looked as though the utilitarianism which came into vogue in the middle of the nineteenth century would be a purely academic matter, without influence on daily life. But such appearances have proved to be deceptive. The dominant tendency is toward a drab utilitarianism in which all higher aspirations are to be lost. This is true even in a country like America, which formerly prided itself on its freedom from bureaucratic regulation of the details of life.

Manifestations of such a tendency can easily be seen. In the state of Nebraska, for example, a law is now in force requiring that no instruction is to be given in any school in the state, public or private, in a language other than English. And no language other than English is to be studied as a language until the child has passed the eighth grade.<sup>2</sup> In other words, no foreign language, apparently not even Latin or Greek, is to be studied until the child is too old to learn it well. This is how modern collectivism deals with the kind of study that is absolutely essential to all genuine mental advance. The minds of the people of Nebraska, and of any other states where similar laws prevail,<sup>3</sup> are to be kept by the power of the state in a permanent condition of arrested development.

It might seem as though this anti-intellectualism had reached its lowest possible depths with such laws. But there are still lower depths. In the state of Oregon, on Election Day, 1922, a law was passed by a referendum vote requiring all children in the state to attend the public schools. Christian schools and private schools, at least in the all-important lower grades, are thus wiped out of existence. If the present temper of the people prevails, such laws will probably soon be extended

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<sup>2</sup> See Laws, Resolutions and Memorials passed by the Legislature of the State of Nebraska at the Thirty-Seventh Session, 1919, Chapter 249, p. 1019.

<sup>3</sup> The evil principle is seen with special clearness in the so-called "Lusk Laws" in the state of New York. One of these refers to teachers in the public schools. The other provides that "No person, firm, corporation or society shall conduct, maintain or operate any school, institute, class or course of instruction in any subjects whatever without making application for and being granted a license from the university of the state of New York to so conduct, maintain or operate such institute, school, class or course." It is further provided that "A school, institute, class or course licensed as provided in this section shall be subject to visitation by officers and employees of the University of the State of New York." See Laws of the State of New York, 1921, Vol. III, Chapter 667, pp. 2049-2051. This law is so broadly worded that it could not possibly be enforced, even by the whole German army in its pre-war efficiency or by all the espionage system of the Czar. The exact measure of enforcement is left to the discretion of officials, and the citizens are placed in constant danger of that intolerable interference with private life which real enforcement of the provision about "courses of instruction in any subjects whatever" would mean. One of the exemptions is in principle particularly bad. "Nor shall such license be required," the law provides, "by schools now or hereafter established and maintained by a religious denomination or sect well-recognized as such at the time this section takes effect." One can certainly rejoice that the existing churches are freed, for the time being, from the menace involved in the law. But in principle, the limitation of the exemption to the existing churches really runs counter to the fundamental idea of religious liberty; for it sets up a distinction between established religions and those that are not established. There was always tolerance for established religious bodies, even in the Roman Empire; but religious liberty consists in equal rights for religious bodies that are new. The other exemptions do not remove in the slightest the oppressive character of the law. Bad as the law must be in its immediate effects, it is far more alarming in what it reveals about the temper of the people. A people which tolerates such preposterous legislation upon the statute books is a people that has wandered far away from the principles of American liberty. True patriotism will not conceal the menace, but will rather seek to recall the citizens to those great principles for which our fathers, in America and In England, were willing to bleed and die. There are some encouraging indications that the Lusk Laws may soon be repealed. If they are repealed, they will still serve as a warning that only by constant watchfulness can liberty be preserved.

far beyond the bounds of one state.<sup>4</sup> This means, of course, the ultimate destruction of all real education. When one considers what the public schools of America already are in many places — their materialism, discouragement of sustained intellectual effort, and encouragement of dangerous pseudo-scientific fads of experimental psychology — one can only be appalled by the thought of a commonwealth in which there is no escape from such a soul-killing system. But the principle of such laws, and their ultimate tendency, are far worse than the immediate results.<sup>5</sup> A public school system in itself has enormous benefits to the race. But it has benefit only if it is kept healthy by free competition from private schools. A public school system is a noteworthy and beneficent achievement of modern times, if it means providing free education for those who desire it. But when it becomes monopolistic, it is the most perfect instrument of tyranny yet devised. Freedom of thought in the Middle Ages was combated by the Inquisition, but the modern method is far more effective. It is difficult to see how even the remnants of liberty can subsist when we place the lives of our children in their formative years under the intimate control of experts appointed by the state. Despite the convictions of their parents, we force them to attend schools where the higher aspirations of humanity are crushed out, and where the mind is filled with the materialism of the day. Such tyranny, supported by a perverse technique that is used as an instrument to destroy human souls, is certainly far more dangerous than the crude tyrannies of the past. Despite their weapons of fire and sword, they at least permitted thought to be free.

The truth is, the materialistic paternalism of the present day will rapidly make America one huge "Main Street" if allowed to go on unchecked. Spiritual adventure will be discouraged. Democracy will consist in reducing all mankind to the narrowest and least gifted of the citizens. God grant that there may come a reaction, and that the great principles of Anglo-Saxon liberty may be rediscovered before it is too late! But whatever solution is found for the educational and social problems of our own country, a lamentable condition still exists in the world at large. It cannot be denied that great men are few or non-existent, and that there has been a general contraction in the area of our personal life. Material betterment has gone hand in hand with spiritual decline.

Such a condition of the world ought to cause us to approach the choice between modernism and traditionalism, liberalism and conservatism, without any of the prejudice that is too often displayed. In view of the lamentable defects of modern life, a type of religion certainly should not be commended simply because it is modern, or condemned simply because it is old. On the contrary, the condition of mankind is such that one may well ask what it is that made the men of past generations so great, and the men of the present generation so small. In the midst of all the material achievements of modern life, one may well ask whether, in gaining the whole world, we have lost our own soul. Are we forever condemned to live the sordid life of utilitarianism? Or is there some lost secret that will restore to mankind something of the glories of the past?

I would discover such a secret in the Christian religion. But the Christian religion I mean is certainly not the religion of the modern liberal Church. It is a message of divine grace as it was in the Middle Ages, almost forgotten now. But it is destined to burst forth once more in God's good time, in a new Reformation, and it will bring light and freedom to mankind. As is the case with all definitions, what that message is can be made clear only by way of exclusion and contrast. In

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<sup>4</sup> In Michigan, a bill similar to the one now passed in Oregon recently received an enormous vote at a referendum, and an agitation looking at least in the same general direction is said to be continuing.

<sup>5</sup> Compare, for example, Legislative Acts of the General Assembly of Ohio, Vol. cviii, 1919, pp. 614f.; and Act, and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of Iowa, 1919, Chapter 198, p. 219.

setting the current liberalism, now almost dominant in the Church, against Christianity, we are not motivated by a merely negative or polemic purpose. On the contrary, by showing what Christianity is not, we hope to be able to show what Christianity is. This may lead men to turn from the weak and beggarly elements of liberalism, and again have recourse to the grace of God.

## Chapter 2: Doctrine

Modern liberalism in the Church, whatever judgment may be passed upon it, is no longer merely an academic matter. It is no longer a matter merely for theological seminaries or universities. On the contrary, its attack upon the fundamentals of the Christian faith is being carried on vigorously by Sunday-School "lesson-helps," by the pulpit, and by the religious press. If such an attack is unjustified, the remedy is not to be found in abolishing theological seminaries, or abandoning scientific theology, as some devout persons have suggested. Rather it is found in a more earnest search for truth, and a more loyal devotion to it once it is found.

At the theological seminaries and universities, however, the roots of the great issue are more clearly seen than in the world at large. Among students, the reassuring employment of traditional phrases is often abandoned. And the advocates of a new religion are not as careful to maintain an appearance of conformity with the past as they are in the Church at large. But we are convinced that such frankness ought to be extended to the people as a whole. Few desires on the part of religious teachers have been more harmfully exaggerated than the desire to "avoid giving offense." That desire has come perilously near dishonesty only too often. The religious teacher, in his heart of hearts, is well aware of the radicalism of his views. But he is unwilling to relinquish his place in the hallowed atmosphere of the Church by speaking his whole mind. Against all such concealment or palliation, we completely sympathize with those who have a passion for light, whether they are radicals or conservatives.

When the traditional phrases have all been stripped away, what is at bottom of all this? What is the real meaning of the present revolt against the fundamentals of the Christian faith? What, in brief, are the teachings of modern liberalism compared to the teachings of Christianity?

At the outset, we are met with an objection. It is said that, "Teachings are unimportant. The exposition of the teachings of liberalism and the teachings of Christianity can arouse no interest today. Creeds are merely the changing expression of a unitary Christian experience, and they are all equally good provided they express that experience. The teachings of liberalism, therefore, could be far removed as possible from the teachings of historic Christianity, and yet the two might be the same at bottom."

Such is the way in which the modern hostility to "doctrine" is often expressed. But is it really doctrine that is objected to, or is it rather one particular doctrine objected to in favor of another? Undoubtedly, in many forms of liberalism, it is the latter alternative which fits the case. There are doctrines of modern liberalism that are just as tenaciously and intolerantly upheld as any doctrines in the historic creeds. Take for example the liberal doctrines of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. These doctrines are, as we shall see, contrary to the doctrines of the Christian religion. But they are doctrines all the same, and as such they require intellectual defense. In seeming to object to all theology, the liberal preacher is often merely objecting to one system of theology in the interests of another. And so the desired immunity from theological controversy has not yet been attained.

Sometimes, however, the modern objection to doctrine is more seriously meant. Whether the objection is well-founded or not, its real meaning should at least be faced.

That meaning is perfectly plain. The objection involves an out-and-out skepticism. If all creeds are equally true, then because they contradict one another, they are all equally false, or at least equally uncertain. We are indulging, therefore, in a mere juggling of words. To say that all creeds are equally true, and that they are based upon experience, merely falls back on the agnosticism of fifty years ago that was regarded as the deadliest enemy of the Church. The enemy has not really been changed into a friend merely because he has been received within the camp. The Christian conception of a creed is very different. According to the Christian conception, a creed is not a mere expression of Christian experience. On the contrary, it is setting forth those facts upon which experience is based.

It is often said that Christianity is a life, not a doctrine. This assertion has the appearance of godliness, but it is radically false. One does not even need to be a Christian to detect its falsity. To say that "Christianity is a life" is to make an assertion in the sphere of history, not in the sphere of ideals. It is far different from saying that Christianity ought to be a life, or that the ideal religion is a life. The assertion that Christianity is a life is subject for historical investigation, exactly as we might investigate the assertion that the Roman Empire under Nero was a free democracy. The Roman Empire under Nero might have been better if it had been a free democracy, but the historical question is simply whether it was a free democracy or not; it is a matter of fact. Christianity is an historical phenomenon, like the Roman Empire, or the Kingdom of Prussia, or the United States of America. And as an historical phenomenon it must be investigated on the basis of historical evidence.

Is it true, then, that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life? The question can be settled only by examining the beginnings of Christianity. Recognition of that fact does not involve any acceptance of Christian belief. It is merely a matter of common sense and common honesty. At the foundation of the life of every corporation is the incorporation paper in which the objects of the corporation are set forth. Other objects may be vastly more desirable than those objects, but if the directors use the name and the resources of the corporation to pursue the other objects, then they are acting ultra vires of the corporation. So it is with Christianity. It is perfectly conceivable that the originators of the Christian movement had no right to legislate for subsequent generations. But they did have an inalienable right to legislate for all generations that would choose to bear the name of "Christian." It is conceivable that Christianity may now have to be abandoned, and another religion substituted for it. But the question of what Christianity is can be determined only by an examination of the beginnings of Christianity.

The beginnings of Christianity constitute a fairly definite historical phenomenon. The Christian movement originated a few days after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. It is doubtful whether anything that preceded the death of Jesus can be called Christianity. At any rate, if Christianity existed before that event, it was Christianity only in a preliminary stage. The name originated after the death of Jesus, and the thing itself was also something new. Evidently there was an important new beginning among the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem after the crucifixion. The beginning of the remarkable movement which spread out from Jerusalem into the Gentile world is to be placed at that time — the movement which is called Christianity.

Definite historical information has been preserved in the Epistles of Paul about the early stages of this movement. These Epistles are regarded by all serious historians as genuine products of the

first Christian generation. The writer of the Epistles had been in direct communication with those intimate friends of Jesus who had begun the Christian movement in Jerusalem. In the Epistles, he makes it abundantly plain what the fundamental character of the movement was.

But if any one fact is clear, on the basis of this evidence, it is that the Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon doctrine.

There should certainly be no debate with regard to Paul himself. Paul was not indifferent to doctrine. On the contrary, doctrine was the very basis of his life. His devotion to doctrine did not, it is true, make him incapable of a magnificent tolerance. One notable example of such tolerance is to be found during his imprisonment at Rome, as attested by the Epistle to the Philippians. Apparently, certain Christian teachers at Rome had been jealous of Paul's greatness. As long as he had been at liberty they had been obliged to take a secondary place. But now that he was in prison, they seized the supremacy. They sought to raise up affliction for Paul in his bonds. They preached Christ out of envy and strife. In short, the rival preachers made the preaching of the gospel a means to gratify low personal ambition. It seems to have been about as mean a piece of business as could well be conceived. But Paul was not disturbed. "Whether in presence, or in truth," he said, "Christ is preached; and I do rejoice in that, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). The way in which the preaching was being carried on was wrong, but the message itself was true; and Paul was far more interested in the content of the message than in the manner of its presentation. It is impossible to conceive a finer piece of broad-minded tolerance.

But the tolerance of Paul was not indiscriminate. He displayed no tolerance in Galatia, for example. There were rival preachers there too. But Paul had no tolerance for them. "But though we," he said, "or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). What is the reason for the difference in the apostle's attitude in the two cases? What is the reason for the broad tolerance in Rome, and the fierce anathemas in Galatia? The answer is perfectly plain. In Rome, Paul was tolerant, because the content of the message that was being proclaimed by the rival teachers was true. In Galatia, he was intolerant, because the content of the rival message was false. In neither case did personalities have anything to do with Paul's attitude. No doubt the motives of the Judaizers in Galatia were far from pure, and Paul does point out their impurity in an incidental way. But that was not the ground of his opposition. The Judaizers no doubt were far from perfect morally, but Paul's opposition to them would have been exactly the same if they had all been angels from heaven. His opposition was based entirely upon the falsity of their teaching. They were substituting a false gospel, which was no gospel at all, for the one true gospel. It never occurred to Paul that a gospel might be true for one man and not for another; the blight of pragmatism had never fallen upon his soul. Paul was convinced of the objective truth of the gospel message, and devotion to that truth was the great passion of his life. Christianity for Paul was not only a life, but also a doctrine, and logically the doctrine came first.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, p. 168. It is not maintained that doctrine for Paul comes temporally before life, but only that it comes logically first. Here is to be found the answer to the objection which Dr. Lyman Abbott raised against the assertion in *The Origin of Paul's Religion*. See *The Outlook*, vol. 132, 1922, pp. 104f.

But what was the difference between the teaching of Paul and the teaching of the Judaizers? What was it that gave rise to the stupendous polemic of the Epistle to the Galatians? To the modern Church, the difference would have seemed to be a mere theological subtlety. The Judaizers were in perfect agreement with Paul about many things. The Judaizers believed that Jesus was the Messiah. There is not a shadow of evidence that they objected to Paul's lofty view of the person of Christ. Without the slightest doubt, they believed that Jesus had really risen from the dead. They believed, moreover, that faith in Christ was necessary to salvation. But the trouble was, they believed that something else was also necessary; they believed that what Christ had done needed to be pieced out by the believer's own effort to keep the Law.

From the modern point of view, the difference would have seemed to be very slight. Paul as well as the Judaizers believed that keeping the law of God, in its deepest import, is inseparably connected with faith. The difference concerned only the logical order of three steps — not even the temporal order. Paul said that a man (1) first believes on Christ, (2) then is justified before God, (3) then immediately proceeds to keep God's law. The Judaizers said that a man (1) believes on Christ and (2) keeps the law of God the best he can, and then (3) is justified. To modern "practical" Christians, the difference would seem to be highly subtle and intangible, hardly worth considering in view of the large measure of agreement they had in the practical realm. What a splendid cleaning up of the Gentile cities it would have been if the Judaizers had succeeded in extending to those cities the observance of the Mosaic law, even including the unfortunate ceremonial observances! Surely Paul ought to have joined in this common cause with teachers who so nearly agreed with him. Surely he ought to have applied to them the great principle of Christian unity.

As a matter of fact, however, Paul did nothing of the kind; and only because he (and others) did nothing of the kind does the Christian Church exist today. Paul saw very clearly that the differences between the Judaizers and himself were between two entirely distinct types of religion, a religion of merit and a religion of grace. If Christ provides only part of our salvation, leaving us to provide the rest, then we are still hopeless under the load of sin. For no matter how small the gap that must be bridged before salvation can be attained, the awakened conscience sees clearly that our wretched attempt at goodness is insufficient to bridge even that gap. The guilty soul enters again into a hopeless reckoning with God, to determine whether we have really done our part. And thus we groan again under the old bondage of the law. Paul saw clearly that such an attempt to partition the work of Christ with our own merit is the very essence of unbelief. Christ will do everything, or he will do nothing. The only hope we have is to throw ourselves unreservedly on His mercy, and trust Him for all.

Paul was certainly right. The differences which divided him from the Judaizers was no mere theological subtlety. It concerned the very heart and core of the religion of Christ. "Just as I am without one plea, But that Your blood was shed for me" — that was what Paul was contending for in Galatia. That hymn would never have been written if the Judaizers had won. And without the thing which that hymn expresses there is no Christianity at all.

Certainly, then, Paul was no advocate of an undogmatic religion. He was interested above everything else in the objective and universal truth of his message. That much will probably be admitted by serious historians, no matter what their own personal attitude toward the religion of Paul may be. Sometimes, the modern liberal preacher seeks to produce an opposite impression by quoting Paul's words out of context, and interpreting them in a way as far removed as possible from their original sense. The truth is, it is hard to give Paul up. The modern liberal desires to

persuade simple Christians (and himself) that there is some sort of continuity between modern liberalism and the thought and life of the great Apostle. But such an impression is altogether misleading. Paul was not interested merely in the ethical principles of Jesus. He was not interested merely in general principles of religion or of ethics. On the contrary, he was interested in the redeeming work of Christ and its effect upon us. His primary interest was in Christian doctrine, and Christian doctrine not merely in its presuppositions but at its center. If Christianity is to be made independent of doctrine, then Paulinism must be removed from Christianity root and branch.

But what of that? Some men are not afraid of the conclusion. If Paulinism must be removed, they say, we can get along without it. Maybe it will turn out that in introducing a doctrinal element into the life of the Church, Paul was only perverting a primitive Christianity that was as independent of doctrine as the modern liberal preacher desires.

This suggestion is clearly overruled by the historical evidence. The problem certainly cannot be solved so easily. Many attempts have been made to sharply separate the religion of Paul from that of the primitive Jerusalem Church. Many attempts have been made to show that Paul introduced an entirely new principle into the Christian movement, or that he was even the founder of a new religion.<sup>7</sup> But all such attempts have resulted in failure. The Pauline Epistles themselves attest a fundamental unity of principle between Paul and the original companions of Jesus. The whole early history of the Church becomes unintelligible except on the basis of such unity. Certainly Paul was no innovator with regard to the fundamentally doctrinal character of Christianity. The fact appears in the whole character of Paul's relationship to the Jerusalem Church, as attested by the Epistles. It also appears with startling clearness in the precious passage in 1 Cor. 15:3-7, where Paul summarizes the tradition which he had received from the primitive Church. What is it that forms the content of that primitive teaching? Is it a general principle of the fatherliness of God or the brotherliness of man? Is it a vague admiration for the character of Jesus, such as what prevails in the modern Church? Nothing could be further from the fact. "Christ died for our sins," said the primitive disciples, "according to the Scriptures; he was buried; he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name "gospel" or "good news" implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of what happened was presented. And when the meaning of what happened was presented, there was Christian doctrine. "Christ died" — that is history; "Christ died for our sins" — that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.

It is perfectly clear, then, that the first Christian missionaries did not simply come forward with an exhortation. They did not say: "Jesus of Nazareth lived a wonderful life of filial piety, and we call upon you our hearers to yield yourselves, as we have done, to the spell of that life." Certainly that is what modern historians would have expected the first Christian missionaries to say. But it must be recognized that, as a matter of fact, they said nothing of the kind. Conceivably the first disciples of Jesus, after the catastrophe of His death, might have engaged in quiet meditation upon His teaching. They might have said to themselves that "Our Father which art in heaven" was a good way of addressing God even though the One who had taught them that prayer was dead. They might have clung to the ethical principles of Jesus and cherished the vague hope that the One who enunciated such principles had some personal existence beyond the grave. Such redactions might

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<sup>7</sup> Some recount of these attempts has been given by the present writer in *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921.

seem very natural to the modern man. But they certainly never occurred to Peter, James, and John. Jesus had raised in them high hopes; those hopes were destroyed by the Cross; and reflections on the general principles of religion and ethics were quite powerless to revive the hopes again. The disciples of Jesus had evidently been far inferior to their Master in every possible way. They had not understood His lofty spiritual teaching. Even in the hour of solemn crisis, they had quarreled over great places in the approaching Kingdom. What hope was there that such men could succeed where their Master had failed? Even when he had been with them, they had been powerless; and now that he was taken from them, what little power they may have had was gone.<sup>8</sup>

Within a few days after the death of their Master, those same weak, discouraged men, instituted the most important spiritual movement that the world has ever seen. What produced the astonishing change? What transformed the weak and cowardly disciples into the spiritual conquerors of the world? Evidently it was not the mere memory of Jesus' life, for that was a source of sadness rather than of joy. Evidently the disciples of Jesus, within the few days between the crucifixion and the beginning of their work in Jerusalem, had received some new equipment for their task. What that new equipment was is perfectly plain, at least in its outstanding and external element (to say nothing of the endowment which Christian men believe to have been received at Pentecost). The great weapon with which the disciples of Jesus set out to conquer the world was not a mere comprehension of eternal principles. It was an historical message, an account of something that had recently happened. It was the message, "He is risen."<sup>9</sup>

But the message of the resurrection was not isolated. It was connected with the death of Jesus, which was now seen to be a triumphant act of divine grace, not a failure. It was connected with the entire appearance of Jesus upon earth. The coming of Jesus was understood as an act of God by which sinful men were saved. The primitive Church was concerned not merely with what Jesus had said, but also primarily with what Jesus had done. The world was to be redeemed through the proclamation of an *event*. And with the event went the *meaning* of the event; and setting forth the meaning of the event was *doctrine*. These two elements are always combined in the Christian message. The narration of the facts is history; the narration of the facts with their meaning is doctrine. "Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried" — that is history. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" — that is doctrine. This was the Christianity of the primitive Church.

"But," it may be said, "even if the Christianity of the primitive Church was dependent on doctrine, we may still emancipate ourselves from that dependence. We may appeal from the primitive Church to Jesus Himself. It has already been admitted that if doctrine is abandoned, Paul must be abandoned. It may now be admitted that if doctrine is abandoned, then the primitive Jerusalem Church must be abandoned, with its message of the resurrection. But possibly we can still find in Jesus Himself the simple, non-doctrinal religion that we desire." Such is the real meaning of the modern slogan, "Back to Christ."

Must we really take such a step? It would certainly be an extraordinary step. A great religion derived its power from the message of the redeeming work of Christ. Without that message, Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> Compare "History and Faith," 1915 (reprinted from *Princeton Theological Review* for July, 1915), pp. 10f.

<sup>9</sup> Compare *A Rapid Survey of the Literature and History of New Testament Times*, published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, Student's Text Book, pp. 42f.

and His disciples will soon be forgotten. The same message, with its implications, has been the very heart and soul of the Christian movement throughout the centuries. Yet we are now asked to believe that the thing that has given Christianity its power all through the centuries was a blunder, that the originators of the movement radically misunderstood the meaning of their Master's life and work, and that it has been left to us moderns to get the first inkling of the initial mistake. Even if this view of the case were correct, and even if Jesus Himself taught a religion like that of modern liberalism, it would still be doubtful whether such a religion could rightly be called Christianity. The name Christian was first applied only after the supposed decisive change had taken place. It is very doubtful whether a name which has been so firmly attached to one religion through nineteen centuries ought now to be applied to another. If the first disciples of Jesus really departed so radically from their Master, then the better terminology would probably lead us to say simply that Jesus was not the founder of Christianity. Instead, he founded a simple, non-doctrinal religion, long forgotten, but now rediscovered by modern men. Even so, the contrast between liberalism and Christianity would still appear.

As a matter of fact, such a strange state of affairs does not prevail at all. It is not true that in basing Christianity upon an event, the disciples of Jesus were departing from the teaching of their Master. For certainly Jesus Himself did the same thing. Jesus did not content Himself with enunciating general principles of religion and ethics. The picture of Jesus as a sage similar to Confucius, uttering wise maxims about conduct, may satisfy Mr. H. G. Wells, as he trips along lightly over the problems of history, but it disappears as soon as one engages seriously in historical research. "Repent," said Jesus, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The gospel which Jesus proclaimed in Galilee consisted in the proclamation of a coming Kingdom. But clearly Jesus regarded the coming of the Kingdom as an event, or as a series of events. No doubt he also regarded the Kingdom as a present reality in the souls of men. No doubt he represented the Kingdom in one sense as already present. We shall not really succeed in getting along without this aspect of the matter in our interpretation of Jesus' words. But we shall also not get along without the other aspect, according to which the coming of the Kingdom depended upon definite and catastrophic events. If Jesus regarded the coming of the Kingdom as dependent upon a definite event, then His teaching was similar at the decisive point to that of the primitive Church. Neither he nor the primitive Church enunciated merely general and permanent principles of religion. On the contrary, both of them made the message depend upon something that *happened*. Only, in the teaching of Jesus the happening was represented as still in the future, while in that of the Jerusalem Church at least its first act lay already in the past. Jesus proclaimed the event as coming; the disciples proclaimed part of it at least as already past. The important thing is that both Jesus and the disciples did proclaim an event. Jesus was certainly not a mere enunciator of permanent truths, like the modern liberal preacher. On the contrary, he was conscious of standing at the turning-point of the ages, when what had never been had now come to be.

Jesus announced not only an event. He also announced the meaning of the event. It is natural, indeed, that the full meaning could be made clear only after the event had taken place. If, then, Jesus really came to announce and bring about an event, the disciples were not departing from His purpose. They set forth the meaning of the event more fully than it could be set forth during the preliminary period constituted by the earthly ministry of their Master. But Jesus Himself, though by way of prophecy, did set forth the meaning of the great happening that was to be the basis of the new era.

Certainly he did so, and grandly, if the words attributed to Him in all of the Gospels are really His. But even if the Fourth Gospel is rejected, and even if the most radical criticism is applied to the other three, it will still be impossible to get rid of this element in Jesus' teaching. The significant words attributed to Jesus at the Last Supper with regard to His approaching death, and the utterance of Jesus in Mk. 10:45 ("The Son of Man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"), have indeed been the subject of vigorous debate. It is difficult to accept such words as authentic and yet maintain the modern view of Jesus at all. Yet it is also difficult to get rid of them on any critical theory. What we are now concerned with, however, is something more general than the authenticity even of these precious words. What we are now concerned to observe is that Jesus certainly did not content Himself with the enunciation of permanent moral principles. He certainly did announce an approaching event, and he certainly did not announce the event without giving some account of its meaning. But when he gave an account of the meaning of the event, no matter how brief that account may have been, he was overstepping the line that separates an undogmatic religion, or even a dogmatic religion that teaches only eternal principles, from one that is rooted in the significance of definite historical facts. He was placing a great gulf between Himself and the philosophic modern liberalism which today incorrectly bears His name.

The teaching of Jesus was also rooted in doctrine in another way. It was rooted in doctrine because it depended upon a stupendous presentation of Jesus' own Person. The assertion is often made, indeed, that Jesus kept His own Person out of His gospel, and came forward merely as the supreme prophet of God. That assertion lies at the very root of the modern liberal conception of the life of Christ. But common as it is, it is radically false. And it is interesting to observe how the liberal historians themselves, as soon as they begin to deal seriously with the sources, are obliged to admit that the real Jesus was not all what they would have liked him to be. Houston Stewart Chamberlain<sup>10</sup> can construct a Jesus who was the advocate of a pure, "formless," non-doctrinal religion. But trained historians, despite their own desires, are obliged to admit that there was an element in the real Jesus which refuses to be pressed into any such mold. As Heitmüller has significantly said, there is "something almost uncanny" about Jesus<sup>11</sup> to the liberal historians.

This "uncanny" element in Jesus is found in His Messianic consciousness. The strange fact is that this supreme revealer of eternal truth thought that he was to be the chief actor in a world catastrophe, and that he was to sit in judgment upon the whole earth. Such is the stupendous form in which Jesus applied the label of Messiah to Himself. And yet modern liberalism appeals to him as a pure teacher of righteousness, a classical exponent of the non-doctrinal religion which is supposed to underlie all the historical religions. They appeal to his teachings as the irreducible truth remaining after the doctrinal accretions have been removed.

It is interesting to observe how modern men have dealt with the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. Some, like Mr. H. G. Wells, have practically ignored it. Without discussing the question whether it is historical or not, they have practically treated it as though it did not exist. They have not allowed it to disturb their construction of the sage of Nazareth. This reconstructed Jesus may be useful to invest modern programs with the sanctity of His hallowed name. And Mr. Wells may

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<sup>10</sup> Mensch und Gott, 1921. Compare the review in *Princeton Theological Review*, xx, 1922 pp. 327-329.

<sup>11</sup> Heitmüller, *Jesus*, 1913, p. 71. See *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, p. 157.

find it edifying to associate Jesus with Confucius in a brotherhood of beneficent vagueness. But what ought to be clearly understood is that such a Jesus has nothing to do with history. He is a purely imaginary figure. He is a symbol and not a fact.

Others, more seriously, have recognized the existence of the problem, but have sought to avoid it by denying that Jesus ever thought that he was the Messiah. They support their denial, not by mere assertions, but by a critical examination of the sources. Such was the effort, for example, of W. Wrede;<sup>12</sup> and a brilliant effort it was. But it has resulted in failure. The Messianic consciousness of Jesus is not merely rooted in the sources considered as documents, but it lies at the very basis of the whole edifice of the Church. J. Weiss has pertinently said that, if the disciples had merely been told before the crucifixion that the Kingdom of God was coming, and if Jesus had really kept His own part in the Kingdom in the background, then when despair finally gave place to joy, why did the disciples not merely say, "Despite Jesus' death, the Kingdom that he foretold will truly come"? Why did they say rather, "Despite His death, he is the Messiah"?<sup>13</sup> From no point of view, then, can the fact be denied that Jesus did claim to be the Messiah — neither from the point of view of acceptance of the Gospel witness as a whole, nor from the point of view of modern naturalism.

And when the Gospel account of Jesus is considered closely, it is found to involve the Messianic consciousness throughout. Even those parts of the Gospels which have been regarded as most purely ethical are found to be based altogether upon Jesus' lofty claims. The Sermon on the Mount is a striking example. It is the fashion now to place the Sermon on the Mount in contrast with the rest of the New Testament. "We will have nothing to do with theology," men say in effect, "we will have nothing to do with miracles, with atonement, or with heaven or with hell. For us, the Golden Rule is a sufficient guide for life. In the simple principles of the Sermon on the Mount we discover a solution of all the problems of society." It is rather strange that men can speak this way. Certainly it is rather derogatory to Jesus to assert that he never said anything worthwhile except in one brief part of His recorded words. But even in the Sermon on the Mount there is far more than some men suppose. Men say that it contains no theology. In reality, it contains theology of the most stupendous kind. In particular, it contains the loftiest possible presentation of Jesus' own Person. That presentation appears in the strange note of authority which pervades the whole discourse; it appears in the recurrent words, "But I say to you." Jesus plainly puts His own words on an equal plane with what he certainly regarded as the divine words of Scripture. He claimed the right to legislate for the Kingdom of God. Let no one object that this note of authority involves merely a prophetic consciousness in Jesus, a mere right to speak in God's name as God's Spirit might lead. What prophet ever spoke in this way? The prophets said, "Thus saith the Lord," but Jesus said, "I say." We have no mere prophet here, no mere humble exponent of the will of God, but a stupendous Person speaking in a manner which for any other person would be abominable and absurd. The same thing appears in the passage Matt. 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many shall say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name,

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<sup>12</sup> *Da' Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 1901.

<sup>13</sup> J. Weiss, "Des Problem der Entstehung des Christentums," in *Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft?* xvi. 1913, p. 466. See *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, p. 156.

and in your name cast out demons, and in your name done many mighty works? And then I shall confess to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you that work lawlessness.'"

This passage, in some respects, is a favorite with modern liberal teachers. It is interpreted — falsely, yet plausibly — to mean that all a man needs to attain standing with God is an approximately right performance of his duties to his fellow-men. He does not need to assent to a creed, or even have a direct relation to Jesus. But those who quote the passage so triumphantly in this way, never stop to reflect on the other side of the picture — upon the stupendous fact that, in this same passage, the eternal destinies of men are dependent on the word of Jesus. Jesus represents Himself here as seated on the judgment-seat of all the earth, forever separating whom he will from the bliss that is involved in being present with Him. Could such a Jesus be further removed from the humble teacher of righteousness appealed to by modern liberalism? Clearly it is impossible to escape from theology, even in the chosen precincts of the Sermon on the Mount. A stupendous theology is the presupposition of the whole teaching, with Jesus' own Person at its center.

But may not that theology still be removed? May we not get rid of the bizarre, theological element that has intruded itself even into the Sermon on the Mount? May we not content ourselves merely with the ethical portion of the discourse? The question is natural, from the point of view of modern liberalism. But it must be answered with an emphatic negative. For the fact is that the ethic of the discourse, taken by itself, will not work at all. The Golden Rule furnishes an example. "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" — is that rule a rule of universal application? Will it really solve all the problems of society? A little experience shows that such is not the case. Help a drunkard to get rid of his evil habit, and you will soon come to distrust the modern interpretation of the Golden Rule. The trouble is that the drunkard's companions apply the rule only too well; they do unto him exactly what they would have him do unto them — by buying him a drink. The Golden Rule becomes a powerful obstacle in the way of moral advance. But the trouble does not lie in the rule itself. It lies in the modern interpretation of the rule. The error consists in supposing that the Golden Rule, with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, is addressed to the whole world. As a matter of fact, the whole discourse is expressly addressed to Jesus' disciples. The great world outside is distinguished in the plainest possible way from them. The persons to whom the Golden Rule is addressed are persons in whom a great change has been wrought — a change which fits them for entrance into the Kingdom of God. Such persons will have pure desires. They, and only they, can safely do unto others as they would have others do unto them, for the things that they would have others do unto them are high and pure.

So it is with the whole of the discourse. The new law of the Sermon on the Mount, in itself, can only produce despair. Strange indeed is the complacency with which modern men can say that the Golden Rule and the high ethical principles of Jesus are all that they need. In reality, if the requirements for entrance into the Kingdom of God are what Jesus declares them to be, we are all undone. We have not even attained to the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. How shall we attain to that righteousness of the heart which Jesus demands? The Sermon on the Mount, rightly interpreted, makes man a seeker after some divine means of salvation by which entrance into the Kingdom can be obtained. Even Moses was too high for us. But before this higher law of Jesus, who shall stand without being condemned? The Sermon on the Mount, like all the rest of the New Testament, really leads a man straight to the foot of the Cross.

Even the disciples, to whom the teaching of Jesus was first addressed, knew well that they needed more than guidance in the way that they should go. It is only a superficial reading of the Gospels that can find the relation of the disciples to Jesus a mere relation of pupil to Master. When Jesus

said, "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," he was speaking not as a philosopher calling pupils to his school, but as One who was in possession of rich stores of divine grace. And this much at least the disciples knew. They knew well in their heart of hearts that they had no right to stand in the Kingdom. They knew that only Jesus could win them entrance there. They did not yet know fully how Jesus could make them children of God, but they did know that he could do it, and he alone. In expectation, all the theology of the great Christian creeds was contained in that trust.

At this point, an objection may arise. The modern liberal will ask, may we not now return to that simple trust of the disciples? May we not cease to ask how Jesus saves. May we not simply leave the way to Him? What need is there to define "effectual calling," what need to enumerate "justification, adoption, sanctification, and the several benefits which either accompany or flow from them in this life?" What need is there even to rehearse the steps in the saving work of Christ as they were rehearsed in the Jerusalem Church? What need is there to say that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures?" Should our trust not be in a Person rather than in a message, in Jesus rather than what he did, in his character rather than in his death?

These are plausible words — plausible, and pitifully vain. Can we really return to Galilee? Are we really in the same situation as those who came to Jesus when he was on earth? Can we hear Him say to us, "Your sins are forgiven you"? These are serious questions, and they cannot possibly be ignored. The plain fact is that Jesus of Nazareth died nineteen hundred years ago. It was possible for the men of Galilee in the first century to trust Him, for he extended His aid to them. For them, life's problem was easy. They only needed to push in through the crowd, or be lowered through some Capernaum roof, and the long search was over. But we are separated by nineteen centuries from the One who alone could give us aid. How can we bridge the gulf of time that separates us from Jesus?

Some persons would bridge the gulf by the mere use of the historical imagination. "Jesus is not dead," we are told, "but lives on through His recorded words and deeds. We do not need to believe it all. Even a part is sufficient. The wonderful personality of Jesus shines out clear from the Gospel story. In other words, Jesus may still be known; let us simply abandon ourselves to His spell, and he will heal us — without theology, without controversy, and without inquiry about miracles."

There is a certain plausibility about that. It may be readily admitted that Jesus lives on in the Gospel record. We see not merely a lifeless picture in that narrative, but we receive the impression of a living Person. As we read, we can still share the astonishment of those who listened to the new teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. We can sympathize with the faith and devotion of the little band of disciples who would not leave Him when others were offended at the hard saying. We feel a sympathetic thrill of joy at the blessed relief given to those who were ill in body and in mind. We can appreciate the wonderful love and compassion of Him who was sent to seek and to save what was lost. It is indeed a wonderful story — not dead, but pulsating with life at every turn.

Certainly the Jesus of the Gospels is a real, living Person. But that is not the only question. We are going forward far too fast. Jesus lives in the Gospels; that much may freely be admitted. But how may we of the twentieth century come into a vital relation to Him? He died nineteen hundred years ago. The life which he now lives in the Gospels is simply the old life lived over and over again. And we have no place in that life; we are spectators, not actors. For us, the life which Jesus lives in the Gospels is only the spurious life of the stage. We sit silent in the playhouse and watch the

absorbing Gospel drama of forgiveness, healing, love, courage, and high endeavor. In rapt attention, we follow the fortunes of those who came to Jesus laboring and heavy laden, and found rest. For a time, our own troubles are forgotten. But suddenly, with the closing of the book, the curtain falls. We go out again into the cold humdrum of our own lives. Gone are the warmth and gladness of an ideal world, and "in their stead a sense of real things comes doubly strong." We are no longer living the lives of Peter, James, and John over again. Alas, we are living our own lives once more, with our own problems, our own misery, and our own sin. And we are still seeking our own Savior.

Let us not deceive ourselves. A Jewish teacher of the first century can never satisfy the longing of our souls. Clothe Him with all the art of modern research, throw the warm, deceptive calcium-light of modern sentimentality on Him, and despite it all, common sense will return to us again. Our brief hour of self-deception, feeling as though we had been with Jesus, will wreak upon us the revenge of hopeless disillusionment.

But the modern preacher says that, in being satisfied with the "historical" Jesus, the great teacher who proclaimed the Kingdom of God, we are merely restoring the simplicity of the primitive gospel. No, we answer, we are not; but you are not so very wrong, temporally at least. You are really returning to a very primitive stage in the life of the Church. Only, that stage is not the Galilean springtime. For in Galilee, men had a living Savior. There was one time and one time only when the disciples lived, like you, merely on the memory of Jesus. When was that? It was a gloomy, desperate time. It was the three sad days after the crucifixion. Then, and only then, did Jesus' disciples regard Him merely as a blessed memory. "We trusted," they said, "that he had been the one to redeem Israel."<sup>14</sup> "We trusted" — but now our trust is gone. Shall we remain, with modern liberalism, forever in the gloom of those sad days? Or shall we pass out from it to the warmth and joy of Pentecost?

We shall certainly remain in the gloom forever if we attend merely to the character of Jesus and neglect what he has done, if we try to attend to the Person and neglect the message. We may have joy for sadness, and power for weakness, but not by easy half-way measure. We will not have them by avoiding controversy, or by trying to hold on to Jesus while rejecting the gospel. What was it that transformed a band of mourners into the spiritual conquerors of the world in a few days? It was not the memory of Jesus' life. It was not the inspiration which came from past contact with Him. It was the message that, "He is risen." That message alone gave the disciples a living Savior; and it alone can give us a living Savior today. We shall never have vital contact with Jesus if we attend to His person and neglect the message; for it is the message which makes Him ours.

But the Christian message contains more than the fact of the resurrection.<sup>15</sup> It is not enough to know that Jesus is alive. It is not enough to know that a wonderful Person lived in the first century of the Christian era, or that he still lives today, somewhere and somehow. Jesus lives, and that is well; but what good is it to us? We are like the inhabitants of far-off Syria or Phoenicia in the days of His flesh. There is a wonderful Person who can heal every ill of body and mind; but, alas, we are not with Him, and the way is far. How shall we come into His presence? How shall we establish contact with Him? For the people of ancient Galilee, contact was established by a touch of Jesus'

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 24:21

<sup>15</sup> For what follows compare *A Rapid Survey of the History and Literature of New Testament Times*, published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, Teacher's Manual, pp. 44f.

hand, or a word from His lips. But for us, the problem is not so easy. We cannot find Him by the lake shore, or in crowded houses. We cannot be lowered into a room where he sits amid scribes and Pharisees. If we only employ our own methods to search, we shall find ourselves on a fruitless pilgrimage. Surely we need guidance if we are to find our Savior.

And in the New Testament, we find guidance full and free — guidance so complete as to remove all doubt, yet so simple that a child can understand it. According to the New Testament, contact with Jesus is established by what Jesus does, not for others, but for us. The account of what Jesus did for others is indeed necessary. By reading how he went about doing good, how he healed the sick, raised the dead, and forgave sins, we learn that he is a Person who is worthy of trust. But such knowledge is not an end in itself to the Christian man; it is a means to an end. It is not enough to know that Jesus is a Person worthy of trust. It is also necessary to know that he is willing to have us trust Him. It is not enough that he saved others. We need to know that he has also saved us.

That knowledge is given in the story of the Cross. For us, Jesus does not merely place His fingers in the ears and say, "Be opened;" for us, he does not merely say "Arise and walk." For us, He has done a greater thing — for us, He died. Our dreadful guilt, the condemnation of God's law, was wiped out by an act of grace. That is the message which brings Jesus near to us. It makes Him not merely the Savior of the men of Galilee long ago, but the Savior of you and me.

It is vain, then, to speak of reposing trust in the Person without believing the message. For trust involves a personal relation between the one who trusts and the one in whom the trust is reposed. And in this case, the personal relation is set up by the blessed theology of the Cross. Without the eighth chapter of Romans, the mere story of the earthly life of Jesus would be remote and dead. For it is through the eighth chapter of Romans, or the message which that chapter contains, that Jesus becomes our Savior today.

The truth is, when men say it is possible to trust in Jesus' Person without accepting the message of His death and resurrection, they do not really mean trust at all. What they designate as trust is really admiration or reverence. They revere Jesus as the supreme Person of all history, and the supreme revealer of God. But trust can come only when the supreme Person extends His saving power to us. "He went about doing good," "He spoke words such as man never spoke," "He is the express image of God" — that is reverence. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" — that is faith.

But the words "He loved me and gave Himself for me" are in historical form. They constitute an account of something that happened. And they add the meaning of the fact to the fact itself. They contain in essence the whole profound theology of redemption through the blood of Christ. Christian doctrine lies at the very roots of faith.

It must be admitted, then, that if we are to have a non-doctrinal religion, or a doctrinal religion founded merely on general truth, we must give up not only Paul and the primitive Jerusalem Church, but we must give up Jesus Himself. But what is meant by doctrine? It has been interpreted here as meaning any presentation of the facts which lie at the base of the Christian religion, along with the true meaning of the facts. But is that the only sense of the word? May the word not also have a narrower sense? May it not also mean a systematic, minute, and one-sidedly scientific presentation of the facts? And if the word is used in this narrower sense, may not the modern objection to doctrine merely be an objection to the excessive subtlety of controversial theology, and not at all an objection to the glowing words of the New Testament? Or may it not be an objection to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and not at all an objection to the first century?

Undoubtedly the word is taken this way by many occupants of the pews when they listen to the modern exaltation of "life" at the expense of "doctrine." The pious hearer labors under the impression that he is merely being asked to return to the simplicity of the New Testament, instead of attending to the subtleties of the theologians. Since it has never occurred to him to attend to the subtleties of the theologians, he has that comfortable feeling that always comes to the churchgoer when some one else's sins are being attacked. It is no wonder that the modern invectives against doctrine constitute a popular type of preaching. At any rate, an attack upon Calvin, or Turretin, or the Westminster divines, does not seem to be a very dangerous thing to the modern churchgoer. In point of fact, however, this attack upon doctrine is not nearly so innocent a matter as our simple churchgoer supposes. For the things objected to in the theology of the Church are also at the very heart of the New Testament. Ultimately the attack is not against the seventeenth century, but against the Bible, and against Jesus Himself.

Even if it were only an attack on the great historic presentations of Biblical teaching, and not the Bible itself, it would still be unfortunate. If the Church were led to wipe out of existence all products of the thinking of nineteen Christian centuries and start fresh, the loss, even if the Bible were retained, would be immense. Once it is admitted that a body of facts lies at the basis of the Christian religion, the efforts which past generations have made toward classifying the facts will have to be treated with respect. No branch of science would have any real advance if every generation started fresh, with no dependence upon what past generations have achieved. Yet in theology, vituperation of the past seems to be thought essential to progress. And upon what base slanders the vituperation is based! After listening to modern tirades against the great creeds of the Church, one receives rather a shock when one turns to the Westminster Confession, for example, or to that tenderest and most theological of books, the "Pilgrim's Progress" of John Bunyan. In doing so, one discovers he has turned from shallow modern phrases to a "dead orthodoxy" that is pulsating with life in every word. In such orthodoxy there is life enough to set the whole world aglow with Christian love.

As a matter of fact, however, in the modern vituperation of "doctrine," it is not merely the great theologians or the great creeds that are being attacked, but the New Testament and our Lord Himself. In rejecting doctrine, the liberal preacher is rejecting Paul's simple words "Who loved me and gave Himself for me," as much as he is rejecting the *homoousion* of the Nicene Creed. For the word "doctrine" is not really used in its narrowest, but in its broadest sense. The liberal preacher is really rejecting the whole basis of Christianity, which is a religion founded not on aspirations, but on facts. The most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity is this: liberalism is entirely in the imperative mood [we ought], while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative [He did]; liberalism appeals to man's will, while Christianity announces a gracious act of God.

In maintaining the doctrinal basis of Christianity, we are particularly anxious not to be misunderstood. There are certain things that we do not mean.

**In the first place**, we do not mean that if doctrine is sound it makes no difference about life. On the contrary, it makes all the difference in the world. From the beginning, Christianity was certainly a way of life. The salvation that it offered was a salvation from sin; and salvation from sin appeared not merely in a blessed hope, but also in an immediate moral change. The early Christians, to the astonishment of their neighbors, lived a strange new kind of life — a life of honesty, purity, and unselfishness. And all other types of life were excluded from the Christian community in the strictest way. From the beginning, Christianity was certainly a life.

But how was the life produced? It might conceivably have been produced by exhortation. That method was often tried in the ancient world. In the Hellenistic age there were many wandering preachers who told men how they ought to live. But such exhortation proved to be powerless. Although the ideals of the Cynic and Stoic preachers were high, these preachers never succeeded in transforming society. The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men by telling a story, not by appealing to the human will, by the narration of an event, not by exhortation. It is no wonder that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? That is what Paul called "the foolishness of the message." It seemed foolish to the ancient world, and it seems foolish to liberal preachers today. But the strange thing is that it works. Its effects appear even in this world. Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds. The lives of men are transformed by a piece of news.

It is especially by such transformation of life that the Christian message is commended to men's attention, today as always. Certainly, then, it makes an enormous difference whether our lives are right. If our doctrine is true, and our lives are wrong, how terrible our sin is! For then we have brought contempt upon the truth itself. On the other hand, it is also very sad when men use the social graces which God has given them, and the moral momentum of a godly ancestry, to commend a message that is false. Nothing in the world can take the place of truth.

**In the second place**, we do not mean that all points of doctrine are equally important. It is perfectly possible for Christian fellowship to be maintained despite differences of opinion.

One such difference of opinion, which has been attaining increasing prominence in recent years, concerns the order of events in connection with the Lord's return. A large number of Christian people believe that when evil has reached its climax in the world, the Lord Jesus will return to this earth in bodily presence to bring about a reign of righteousness which will last a thousand years. The end of the world will come only after that period. That belief, in the opinion of the present writer, is an error, arrived at by a false interpretation of the Word of God. We do not think that the prophecies of the Bible permit so definite a mapping-out of future events. The Lord will come again, and it will be no mere "spiritual" coming in the modern sense — that much is clear. But that so little will be accomplished by the present dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and so much is left to be accomplished by the Lord in bodily presence, is a view that we cannot find justified by the words of Scripture. What is our attitude, then, with regard to this debate? Certainly it cannot be an attitude of indifference. The recrudescence of "Chiliasm" or "**premillennialism**" in the modern Church causes us serious concern. We think it is coupled with a false method of interpreting Scripture, which will produce harm in the long run. Yet how great is our agreement with those who hold the premillennial view! They share our reverence for the authority of the Bible to the full, and they differ from us only in the interpretation of the Bible. They share our ascription of deity to the Lord Jesus, and our super-naturalistic conception of both the entrance of Jesus into the world and the consummation when He shall come again. Certainly, then, from our point of view, their error, serious though it may be, is not deadly error. And Christian fellowship can still unite us with them, with loyalty not only to the Bible but to the great creeds of the Church. It is therefore highly misleading when modern liberals represent the present issue in the Church, both in the mission field and at home, as being an issue between premillennialism and the opposite view. It is really an issue between Christianity, premillennial or not, and a naturalistic negation of all Christianity.

Another difference of opinion which can subsist in the midst of Christian fellowship is the difference of opinion about the mode of efficacy of the **sacraments**. That difference is indeed serious. To deny its seriousness would be a far greater error than to take the wrong side in the controversy itself. It is often said that the divided condition of Christendom is an evil, and so it is. But the evil consists in the existence of the errors which cause the divisions, and not at all in the recognition of those errors once they exist. At the "Marburg Conference" between Luther and the representatives of the Swiss Reformation, it was a great calamity when Luther wrote on the table with regard to the Lord's Supper, "This is my body," and said to Zwingli and Oecolampadius, "You have another spirit." That difference of opinion led to the breach between the Lutheran and the Reformed branches of the Church. It caused Protestantism to lose much of the ground that might otherwise have been gained. It was a great calamity indeed. But the calamity was due to the fact that Luther (as we believe) was wrong about the Lord's Supper. It would have been a far greater calamity if, being wrong about the Supper, he had represented the whole question as a trifling affair. Luther was wrong about the Supper, but not nearly so wrong as he would have been if, being wrong, he had said to his opponents: "Brethren, this matter is a trifle; it really makes very little difference what a man thinks about the Lord's table." Such indifference would have been far more deadly than all the divisions between the branches of the Church. If Luther had compromised with regard to the Lord's Supper, he would never have said at the Diet of Worms, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me, Amen." Indifference about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.

Still another difference of opinion concerns the nature and prerogatives of the Christian ministry. According to Anglican doctrine, the bishops are in possession of an authority which has been handed down to them by successive ordination from the apostles of the Lord; and without such ordination there is no valid priesthood. Other churches deny this doctrine of "**apostolic succession**," and they hold a different view of the ministry. Here again, the difference is no trifle. We have little sympathy with those who, in the mere interests of Church efficiency, try to induce Anglicans to let down the barrier which their principles have led them to erect. But despite the importance of this difference, it does not descend to the very roots. To the conscientious Anglican, who regards the members of other bodies as being in schism, Christian fellowship with individuals in those other bodies is still possible. And certainly those who reject the Anglican view of the ministry can regard the Anglican Church as a genuine and very noble member in the body of Christ.

Another difference of opinion is that between the Calvinistic or Reformed theology, and the **Arminianism** which appears in the Methodist Church. It is difficult to see how any one who has really studied the question can regard that difference as an unimportant matter. On the contrary, it touches very closely some of the profoundest things of the Christian faith. A Calvinist is constrained to regard the Arminian theology as a serious impoverishment of the Scripture doctrine of divine grace. And equally serious is the view that the Arminian must hold as to the doctrine of the Reformed Churches. Yet here again, true evangelical fellowship is possible between those who hold sharply opposing views with regard to some exceedingly important matters.

Far more serious still is the division between the Church of Rome and evangelical Protestantism in all its forms. Yet how great is the common heritage which unites the **Roman Catholic** Church, with its maintenance of the authority of Holy Scripture and with its acceptance of the great early creeds, to devout Protestants today! We would not obscure the difference which divides us from Rome. The gulf is indeed profound. But profound as it is, it seems almost trifling compared to the

abyss which stands between us and many ministers of our own Church. The Church of Rome may represent a perversion of the Christian religion; but naturalistic liberalism is not Christianity at all.

*That does not mean that conservatives and liberals must live in personal animosity.* It does not involve any lack of sympathy on our part for those who have felt obliged by the current of the times to relinquish their confidence in the strange message of the Cross. Many ties — ties of blood, citizenship, ethical aims, humanitarian endeavor — unite us to those who have abandoned the gospel. We trust that those ties may never be weakened, and that ultimately they may serve some purpose in the propagation of the Christian faith. But Christian service consists primarily in the propagation of a message, and specifically Christian fellowship exists only between those to whom the message has become the very basis of all life.

The character of Christianity as founded upon a message is summed up in the words of the eighth verse of the first chapter of Acts — "You shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth." For the present purpose, it is entirely unnecessary to argue about the historical value of the Book of Acts, or to discuss the question whether Jesus really spoke the words just quoted. In any case, the verse must be recognized as an adequate summary of what is known about primitive Christianity. From the beginning, Christianity was a campaign of witnessing. And the witnessing did not concern merely what Jesus was doing within the recesses of the individual life. Taking the words of Acts in that way does violence to the context and all the evidence. On the contrary, the Epistles of Paul and all the sources make it abundantly plain that the testimony was primarily speaking to what Jesus had done once for all in His death and resurrection, not to inner spiritual facts.

Christianity is based, then, upon an account of something that happened, and the Christian worker is primarily a witness. But if so, it is rather important that the Christian worker should tell the truth. When a man takes his seat on the witness stand, it makes little difference what the cut of his coat is, or whether his sentences are nicely turned. The important thing is that he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If we are to be truly Christians, it makes a vast difference what our teachings are. It is by no means aside from the point to set forth the teachings of Christianity in contrast with the teachings of the chief modern rival of Christianity.

The chief modern rival of Christianity is "liberalism." An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that at every point the two movements are in direct opposition. That examination will now be undertaken, though merely in a summary and cursory way.

### Chapter 3: "God & Man"

It has been observed in the last chapter that Christianity is based on an account of something that happened in the first century of our era. But before that account can be received, certain presuppositions must be accepted. The Christian gospel consists in an account of how God saved man. Before that gospel can be understood, something must be known (1) about God and (2) about man. The doctrine of God and the doctrine of man are the two great presuppositions of the gospel. With regard to these presuppositions, as with regard to the gospel itself, modern liberalism is diametrically opposed to Christianity.

In the first place, it is opposed to Christianity in its conception of God. But at this point we are met with a particularly insistent form of that objection to doctrinal matters we considered earlier. We

are told it is unnecessary to have a "conception" of God. It is said that theology, or the knowledge of God, is the death of religion. We should not seek to know God, but merely feel His presence.

With regard to this objection, if religion consists merely in feeling the presence of God, it ought to be observed that it is devoid of any moral quality whatever. Pure feeling, if there is such a thing, is non-moral. For example, what makes affection for a human friend such an ennobling thing, is the knowledge we possess of the character of our friend. Human affection, apparently so simple, is really bristling with dogma. It depends on a host of observations that are treasured up in the mind with regard to the character of our friends. But if human affection is really dependent on knowledge, then why would it be otherwise with the supreme personal relationship that is the basis of religion? Why should we be indignant about slanders directed against a human friend, while at the same time we are patient about the basest slanders directed against our God? Certainly it makes the greatest possible difference what we think about God; the knowledge of God is the very basis of religion.

How, then, shall God be known? How shall we become so acquainted with Him that personal fellowship may become possible? Some liberal preachers would say that we become acquainted with God only through Jesus. That assertion has an appearance of loyalty to our Lord, but in reality it is highly derogatory to Him. For Jesus Himself plainly recognized other valid ways of knowing God. To reject those other ways is to reject the things that lay at the very center of Jesus' life. Jesus plainly found God's hand in nature; the lilies of the field revealed the weaving of God to Him. He found God also in the moral law; the law written in the hearts of men was God's law, which revealed His righteousness. Finally Jesus plainly found God revealed in the Scriptures. How profound was our Lord's use of the words of prophets and psalmists! To say that such revelation of God was invalid or useless to us today, is to insult things that lay closest to Jesus' mind and heart.

When men say that we know God only as He is revealed in Jesus, they are denying all real knowledge of God. For unless there is some idea of God independent of Jesus, ascribing deity to Jesus is meaningless. Saying "Jesus is God" has no meaning unless the word "God" has an antecedent meaning. And meaning is attached to the word "God" in the ways just mentioned. We are not forgetting the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." But these words do not mean that, if someone had never known what the word "God" meant, he could understand it merely by knowing Jesus' character. On the contrary, the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking already had a very definite concept of God; a knowledge of the one supreme Person was presupposed in all that Jesus said. What the disciples desired was not only a knowledge of God, but also intimate, personal contact. And that came through their intercourse with Jesus. Jesus revealed, in a wonderfully intimate way, the character of God. Such revelation obtained its true significance only on the basis of both the Old Testament heritage, and Jesus' own teaching. Rational theism, the knowledge of one Supreme Person, Maker and active Ruler of the world, is at the very root of Christianity.

The modern preacher will say that it is incongruous to attribute to Jesus an acceptance of "rational theism". He had a practical knowledge of God, not theoretical. There is a sense in which these words are true. Certainly no part of Jesus' knowledge of God was merely theoretical. Everything that Jesus knew about God touched His heart and determined His actions. In that sense, Jesus' knowledge of God was "practical." But unfortunately that is not what is meant by this assertion of modern liberalism. What is frequently meant by a "practical" knowledge of God in modern parlance is not a theoretical knowledge of God that is also practical, but a practical knowledge that

is not theoretical. In other words, it means a knowledge that gives no information about objective reality, a knowledge which is no knowledge at all. Nothing could possibly be more unlike the religion of Jesus than that. The relation of Jesus to His heavenly Father was not a relation to a vague and impersonal goodness. It was not a relation which merely clothed itself in symbolic, personal form. On the contrary, it was a relation to a real Person, whose existence was just as definite, and just as much a subject of theoretic knowledge, as the existence of the lilies of the field that God had clothed. The very basis of the religion of Jesus was a triumphant belief in the real existence of a personal God.

Without that belief, no type of religion can rightly appeal to Jesus today. Jesus was a theist, and rational theism is at the basis of Christianity. Jesus did not support His theism by argument; He did not answer the Kantian attack on theistic proofs in advance. But that does not mean He was indifferent to the belief that logically results from those proofs. The belief stood so firm, both to Him and to His hearers, that it was always presupposed in His teaching. So today it is not necessary for all Christians to analyze the logical basis of their belief in God. The human mind has a wonderful faculty for condensing perfectly valid arguments. What seems like an instinctive belief, may turn out to be the result of many logical steps. Or it may be that the belief in a personal God is the result of a primitive revelation, and theistic proofs are only the logical confirmation of what was originally arrived at by a different means. At any rate, the logical confirmation of the belief in God is a vital concern to the Christian. At this point, as at many others, religion and philosophy are connected in the most intimate possible way. True religion can make no peace with a false philosophy, any more than it can with a false science. A thing cannot possibly be true in religion and false in philosophy, or in science. All methods of arriving at truth, if they are valid methods, will arrive at a harmonious result. Certainly the atheistic or agnostic Christianity, which sometimes goes under the name of "practical" religion, is no Christianity at all. At the very root of Christianity is the belief in the real existence of a personal God.

The liberal preacher loves to use one designation of God which is nothing if not theistic. He loves to speak of God as "Father." Strangely enough, he does so at the very time when modern liberalism is decrying theistic proofs, and taking refuge in "practical" knowledge which is somehow independent of scientifically or philosophically ascertained facts. The term certainly has the merit of ascribing personality to God. It is not seriously meant by some of those who use it. It is employed by others only because it is useful, not because it is true. But not all liberals are able to make the subtle distinction between theoretic judgments and judgments of value. Some liberals, though perhaps a decreasing number, truly believe in a personal God. And such men are able to truly think of God as a Father.

The term "Father" presents a very lofty conception of God. It is not exclusively Christian. It has been applied to God outside of Christianity. It appears, for example, in the widespread belief in an "All-Father," which prevails among many races, even in company with polytheism. It appears here and there in the Old Testament, and in pre-Christian Jewish writings subsequent to the Old Testament period. Such occurrences of the term are by no means devoid of significance. The Old Testament usage, in particular, is a worthy precursor of our Lord's teaching. In the Old Testament, the word "Father" ordinarily designates God in relation to the nation or the king instead of the individual. Yet, because he was part of the chosen people, the individual Israelite felt a peculiarly intimate relation to the covenant God. Despite this anticipation of the teaching of our Lord, Jesus brought an incomparable enrichment of the usage of the term. And so, it is correct to regard the thought of God-as-Father as characteristically Christian.

Modern men have been so impressed with this element in Jesus' teaching, that they have sometimes been inclined to regard it as the very sum and substance of our religion. We are not interested, they say, in many things for which men formerly gave their lives. We are not interested in the theology of the creeds. We are not interested in the doctrines of sin and salvation. We are not interested in atonement through the blood of Christ. The simple truth of the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man, is enough for us. We may not be very orthodox in the theological sense, they continue, but of course you will recognize us as Christians because we accept Jesus' teaching as to the Father God.

It is very strange how intelligent persons can speak this way. It is very strange how those who accept only the universal fatherhood of God, as the sum and substance of religion, can regard themselves as Christians, or can appeal to Jesus of Nazareth. The plain fact is, that this modern doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God formed no part whatever of Jesus' teaching. Where did Jesus teach the universal fatherhood of God? Certainly not in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the first place, the acceptance of publicans and sinners by Jesus was the occasion for the Pharisees' objection, and for Jesus' answer to them by means of the parable. The only ones present were members of the chosen people, and as such they could be designated sons of God. In the second place, a parable should not be pressed in its details. This is so here, because the joy of the father in the parable is like the joy of God when a sinner receives salvation at Jesus' hand. It does not follow that this relation of a Father to his children applies to still unrepentant sinners. Where else, then, can the universal fatherhood of God be found? Surely not in the Sermon on the Mount. For throughout the Sermon on the Mount, those who can call God Father are distinguished in the most emphatic way from the great world of the Gentiles outside. One passage in the discourse has been urged in support of the modern doctrine: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you; that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust" (Matt. 5:44, 45). The passage will not bear the weight hung on it. God is indeed represented here as caring for all men, whether evil or good, but He is not called the Father of all. Indeed, it might almost be said that the point of the passage depends on the fact that He is not the Father of all. He cares even for those who are not His children, but His enemies. So those who are His children, Jesus' disciples, ought to imitate Him by loving even those who are not their brethren, but their persecutors. The modern doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God is not to be found in the teaching of Jesus.

And it is not to be found in the New Testament. The whole New Testament, and Jesus Himself, do indeed represent God as a father to his children, whether Christians or not. He is the Author of the being of all, and as such he might well be called the Father of all. He cares for all, and for that reason he might also be called the Father of all. Here and there the figure of fatherhood seems to be used to designate this broader relationship which God sustains to all men, or even to all created beings. So in an isolated passage in Hebrews, God is spoken of as the "Father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). Perhaps it is the relation of God as creator to the personal beings whom He created which is in view here. One of the clearest instances of the broader use of the figure of fatherhood is found in the speech of Paul at Athens, Acts 17:28: "For we are also His offspring." Here it is plainly the relation in which God stands to all men, whether Christians or not, which he has in mind. But the words form part of an hexameter line, and they are taken from a pagan poet. They are not represented as part of the gospel. They merely belong to the common meeting-ground which Paul discovered in speaking to his pagan hearers. This passage is only typical of what appears in the New Testament as a whole. That is, something analogous to a universal fatherhood of God is taught in the New Testament. Here and there the terminology of fatherhood and sonship is even used to

describe this general relationship. But such instances are extremely rare. Ordinarily the lofty term "Father" is used to describe a relationship of a far more intimate kind. It is the relationship in which God stands to the company of the redeemed.

The modern doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God is celebrated as "the essence of Christianity." At best, it only belongs to the vague natural religion that the Christian preacher uses to proclaim the gospel. When it is regarded as a reassuring, all-sufficient thing in itself, it directly opposes the New Testament. The gospel refers to something entirely different. The really distinctive New Testament teaching about the fatherhood of God concerns only those who have been brought into the household of faith.

There is nothing narrow about such teaching. The door of the household of faith is open wide to all. The door is the "new and living way" that Jesus opened by His blood. And if we really love our fellow men, we shall not join the liberal preacher by trying to make men satisfied with the coldness of a vague natural religion. By preaching the gospel we shall invite them into the warmth and joy of the house of God. Christianity offers men all that is offered by the modern liberal teaching about the universal fatherhood of God; but it is Christianity only because it offers infinitely more.

But the liberal conception of God differs even more fundamentally from the Christian view than in the terminology of fatherhood. The truth is that liberalism has lost sight of the very center and core of Christian teaching. There are many elements in the Christian view of God as set forth in the Bible. But one attribute of God is absolutely fundamental, and absolutely necessary to render all the rest intelligible. That attribute is the awful transcendence of God. From beginning to end, the Bible is concerned to set forth the awful gulf that separates the creature from the Creator. According to the Bible, it is indeed true that God is immanent in the world. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him. But he is immanent in the world, not because He is identified with the world, but because He is the free Creator and Upholder of the world. A great gulf is fixed between the creature and the Creator.

In modern liberalism, on the other hand, this sharp distinction between God and the world is broken down. The name "God" is applied to the mighty world process itself. We find ourselves in the midst of a mighty process, which manifests itself in the indefinitely small and in the indefinitely great — in the infinitesimal life which is revealed through the microscope, and in the vast movements of the heavenly spheres. To this world-process, of which we ourselves form a part, we apply the dread name of "God." In effect, therefore, it is said that God is not a person distinct from ourselves; on the contrary our life is a part of His. Thus, according to modern liberalism, the Gospel story of the Incarnation is a symbol of the general truth that man at his best is one with God.

It is strange how such a representation can be regarded as anything new. For as a matter of fact, it is pantheism, a very ancient phenomenon. It has always been with us to blight the religious life of man. And modern liberalism, even when it is not consistently pantheistic, is at any rate pantheizing. It tends to break down the separateness between God and the world, and the sharp personal distinction between God and man. In this view, even the sin of man ought to be logically regarded as part of the life of God. The living and holy God of the Bible and of Christian faith is very different.

Christianity differs from liberalism, then, in its conception of God. But it also differs in its conception of man.

Modern liberalism has lost all sense of the gulf that separates the creature from the Creator. Its doctrine of man follows naturally from its doctrine of God. It denies the creature limitations of mankind. But another difference is even more important. According to the Bible, man is a sinner under the just condemnation of God. According to modern liberalism, there is really no such thing as sin. At the very root of the modern liberal movement is the loss of the consciousness of sin.<sup>16</sup>

The consciousness of sin was formerly the starting-point of all preaching; but today it is gone. Characteristic of the modern age, above all else, is a supreme confidence in human goodness. The religious literature of the day suggests that confidence. Get beneath the rough exterior of men, we are told, and we shall discover enough self-sacrifice to found the hope of society on it. The world's evil, it is said, can be overcome with the world's good. No help is needed from outside the world.

What has produced this satisfaction with human goodness? What has become of the consciousness of sin, which has certainly been lost? What has removed it from the hearts of men?

In the first place, the war perhaps had something to do with the change. In time of war, our attention is called so exclusively to the sins of other people that we are inclined to forget our own sins. Attention to the sins of other people is, indeed, sometimes necessary. It is quite right to be indignant against any oppression of the weak which is being carried on by the strong. But such a habit of mind, if made permanent, if carried over into the days of peace, has its dangers. It joins forces with the collectivism of the modern state to obscure the individual and personal character of guilt. If John Smith beats his wife nowadays, no one is so old-fashioned as to blame John Smith for it. On the contrary, it is said, John Smith is evidently the victim of some of that Bolshevistic propaganda. Congress ought to be called in extra session to take up the case of John Smith in an alien and sedition law.

But the loss of the consciousness of sin is far deeper than the war. It has its roots in a mighty spiritual process which has been active during the past seventy-five years. Like other great movements, that process has come silently — so silently that its results have been achieved before the plain man was even aware of what was taking place. Nevertheless, despite all superficial continuity, a remarkable change has come about within the last seventy-five years. The change is nothing less than the substitution of paganism for Christianity as the dominant view of life. Seventy-five years ago, Western civilization, despite inconsistencies, was still predominantly Christian; today it is predominantly pagan.

In speaking of "paganism," we are not using a term of reproach. Ancient Greece was pagan, but it was glorious. The modern world has not even begun to equal its achievements. What, then, is paganism? The answer is not really difficult. Paganism is that view of life which finds the highest goal of human existence in the healthy, harmonious, and joyous development of existing human faculties. The Christian ideal is very different. Paganism is optimistic with regard to unaided human nature' whereas Christianity is the religion of the broken heart.

In saying that Christianity is the religion of the broken heart, we do not mean that Christianity ends with the broken heart. We do not mean that the characteristic Christian attitude is a continual beating on the breast, or a continual crying of "Woe is me." Nothing could be further from the fact. On the contrary, Christianity means that sin is faced once for all. And then, by the grace of God, it is cast forever into the depths of the sea. The trouble with the paganism of ancient Greece is the

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<sup>16</sup> For what follows, see "The Church In the War," in *The Presbyterian* for May 29, 1919, pp. 10f.

same as with the paganism of modern times. It was not in the superstructure, which was glorious, but in the foundation, which was rotten. There was always something to be covered up. The enthusiasm of the architect was maintained only by ignoring the disturbing fact of sin. In Christianity, on the other hand, nothing needs to be covered up. The fact of sin is faced squarely once for all. It is dealt with by the grace of God. But then, after sin has been removed by the grace of God, the Christian can proceed to develop joyously every faculty that God has given him. Such is the higher Christian humanism — a humanism founded not upon human pride but upon divine grace.

Although Christianity does not end with the broken heart, it does begin with the broken heart; it begins with the consciousness of sin. Without the consciousness of sin, the whole of the gospel will seem to be an idle tale. But how can the consciousness of sin be revived? Something no doubt can be accomplished by the proclamation of the law of God, for the law reveals transgressions. Moreover, the whole law should be proclaimed. It will hardly be wise to adopt the suggestion that we must stop treating the little sins as though they were big sins. This suggestion was recently offered among many others as a way to modify our message in order to retain the allegiance of returning soldiers. It apparently means we should not worry too much about the little sins; we should leave them unmolested.

With regard to such an expedient, it may perhaps be suggested that in the moral battle we are fighting against a very resourceful enemy. He does not reveal the position of his guns by desultory artillery action when he plans a great attack. In the moral battle, as in the Great European War, the quiet sectors are usually the most dangerous. It is through the "little sins" that Satan gains an entrance into our lives. Therefore, it will probably be prudent to watch all sectors of the front and lose no time about introducing the unity of command.

But if the consciousness of sin is to be produced, the law of God must be proclaimed in the lives of Christian people as well as in word. It is quite useless for the preacher to breathe out fire and brimstone from the pulpit, if the occupants of the pews take sin very lightly and are content with the moral standards of the world. The rank and file of the Church must do their part in proclaiming the law of God by their lives in a way that reveals the secrets of men's hearts.

All these things, however, are quite insufficient in themselves to produce the consciousness of sin. The more one observes the condition of the Church, the more one feels obliged to confess that the conviction of sin is a great mystery that can be produced only by the Spirit of God. Proclamation of the law, in word and in deed, can prepare for the experience, but the experience itself comes from God. When a man has that experience, and comes under the conviction of sin, his whole attitude toward life is transformed. He wonders at his former blindness. The message of the gospel, which before seemed an idle tale, now becomes instinct with light. But it is God alone who can produce this change.

Only, let us not try to do without the Spirit of God.

The fundamental fault of the modern Church is that she is busily engaged in an absolutely impossible task. She is calling the righteous to repentance. Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride. They are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as follows: "You people are very good," he says. "You respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible —

especially in the life of Jesus — something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people." Such is modern preaching. It is heard every Sunday in thousands of pulpits. But it is entirely futile. Even our Lord did not call the righteous to repentance. We probably shall be no more successful than He.

#### Chapter 4: "The Bible"

Modern liberalism, it has been observed so far, has lost sight of the two great presuppositions of the Christian message — the living God, and the fact of sin. The liberal doctrine of God, and the liberal doctrine of man, are both diametrically opposite to the Christian view. The divergence concerns not only the presuppositions of the message, but the message itself.

The Christian message has come to us through the Bible. What shall we think about this Book which contains the message?

According to the Christian view, the Bible contains a revelation from God to man, which is found nowhere else. The Bible also confirms and wonderfully enriches the revelations that are given by the things that God has made, and by the conscience of man. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork"<sup>17</sup> — these words are a confirmation of the revelation of God in nature; "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"<sup>18</sup> — these words are a confirmation of what is attested by the conscience. But in addition to such reaffirmations of what might conceivably be learned elsewhere, the Bible also contains an account of a revelation which is absolutely new. That new revelation concerns the way by which sinful man can come into communion with the living God.

The way was opened, according to the Bible, by an act of God. Almost nineteen hundred years ago, outside the walls of Jerusalem, the eternal Son was offered as a sacrifice for the sins of men. To that one great event the whole Old Testament looks forward. And in that one event the whole of the New Testament finds its center and core. Salvation then, according to the Bible, is not something that was *discovered*, but something that *happened*. From this appears the uniqueness of the Bible. All the ideas of Christianity might be discovered in some other religion, but there would be no Christianity in that religion. For Christianity depends upon the narration of an event, not a complex of ideas. Without that event, in the Christian view, the world is altogether dark, and humanity is lost under the guilt of sin. There can be no salvation by the discovery of eternal truth. Eternal truth brings nothing but despair, because of sin. But a new face has been put upon life by the blessed thing that God did when He offered up His only begotten Son.

An objection is sometimes offered against this view of the contents of the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Must we depend on what happened so long ago? Does salvation wait upon the examination of musty records? Can no one can see God without the gracious intervention of a trained student of Palestinian history, the modern priest? Can we not find, instead, a salvation that is independent of history, a salvation that depends only on what is with us here and now?

The objection is not devoid of weight. But it ignores one of the primary evidences for the truth of the gospel record. That evidence is found in Christian experience.

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<sup>17</sup> Ps. 19:1

<sup>18</sup> Rom. 3:23

<sup>19</sup> For what follows compare *History and Faith*, 1915, pp. 13-15.

Salvation does depend upon what happened long ago, but the event of long ago has effects that continue until today. We are told in the New Testament that Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of those who would believe on Him. That is a record of a past event. But we can test it today, and in testing it we find it to be true. We are told in the New Testament that on a certain morning long ago Jesus rose from the dead. That is a record of a past event. But again we can test it, and in testing it we discover that Jesus is truly a living Savior today.

But at this point a fatal error lies in wait. It is one of the root errors of modern liberalism. Christian experience, we have just said, is useful in confirming the gospel message. But because it is necessary, many men have jumped to the conclusion that it is all that is necessary. It is said, having a present experience of Christ in the heart, may we not hold onto that experience no matter what history may tell us as to the events of the first Easter morning? May we not make ourselves independent of the results of Biblical criticism? No matter what sort of man history may tell us Jesus of Nazareth actually was, no matter what history may say about the real meaning of His death, or about the story of His alleged resurrection, may we not continue to experience the presence of Christ in our souls?

The trouble is that an experience maintained in this way is not a Christian experience. It may be a religious experience, but it is certainly not a Christian experience. Christian experience absolutely depends upon an event. The Christian says to himself: "I have meditated upon the problem of becoming right with God. I have tried to produce a righteousness that will stand in His sight. But when I heard the gospel message, I learned that what I weakly strove to accomplish had been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ when He died for me on the Cross. And he completed His redeeming work by his glorious resurrection. If the thing has not yet been done, and I only think it has been accomplished, then I am of all men most miserable, for I am still in my sins. My Christian life depends entirely on the truth of the New Testament record."<sup>20</sup>

Christian experience is rightly used when it confirms the documentary evidence. But it can never possibly provide a substitute for the documentary evidence. We know that the gospel story is true partly because of the early date of the documents in which it appears, the evidence as to their authorship, the internal evidence of their truth, and the impossibility of explaining them as being based upon deception or upon myth. This evidence is gloriously confirmed by present experience. That experience adds to the documentary evidence a wonderful directness and immediacy of conviction which delivers us from fear. Christian experience is rightly used when it helps to convince us that the events narrated in the New Testament actually occurred. But it can never enable us to be Christians independently of whether the events occurred or not. Christian experience is a fair flower, and it should be prized as a gift of God. But cut it from its root in the blessed Book, and it soon withers away and dies.

Thus, the revelation contained in the Bible embraces not only a reaffirmation of eternal truths — because the truths have been obscured by the blinding effect of sin — but also a revelation which sets forth the meaning of an act of God.

The contents of the Bible, then, are unique. But another fact about the Bible is also important. The Bible might contain an account of a true revelation from God, and yet the account could be full of error. Therefore, before the full authority of the Bible can be established, it is necessary to add the Christian doctrine of inspiration to the Christian doctrine of revelation. This doctrine means that

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<sup>20</sup> 1Cor. 15:12-17

the Bible not only is an account of important things, but that the account itself is true. Despite fully maintaining their habits of thought and expression, the writers have been preserved from error in such a way that the resulting Book is the "infallible rule of faith and practice."

This doctrine of "plenary inspiration" has been persistently misrepresented. Its opponents speak of it as though it involved a mechanical theory of the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, it is said, is represented in this doctrine as dictating the Bible to writers who were really little more than stenographers. But of course all such caricatures are without basis in fact. It is rather surprising that intelligent men would be so blinded by prejudice about this matter, that they would not personally examine the readily accessible treatises in which the doctrine of plenary inspiration is presented. It is usually considered good practice to examine a thing before echoing some vulgar ridicule of it. But in connection with the Bible, such scholarly restraints are somehow regarded as out of place. It is so much easier to content one's self with a few opprobrious adjectives such as "mechanical." Why engage in serious criticism when people prefer ridicule? Why attack a real opponent when it is easier to knock down a man of straw?<sup>21</sup>

As a matter of fact, the doctrine of plenary inspiration does not deny the individuality of the Biblical writers. It does not ignore their use of ordinary means for acquiring information. It does not involve any lack of interest in the historical situations which gave rise to the Biblical books. What it does deny is the presence of error in the Bible. It supposes that the Holy Spirit informed the minds of the Biblical writers in such a way that they were kept from falling into the errors that mar all other books. The Bible might contain an account of a genuine revelation of God, and yet not contain a true account. But according to the doctrine of inspiration, the account is a true account, as a matter of fact. The Bible is an "infallible rule of faith and practice."

That is certainly a stupendous claim. It is no wonder that it has been attacked. But the trouble is that the attack is not always fair. If the liberal preacher objected to the doctrine of plenary inspiration on the ground that there are errors in the Bible, then he might be right or he might be wrong. But at least the discussion would be conducted on the proper ground. Too often the preacher desires to avoid the delicate question of errors in the Bible because the question might give offense to the rank and file. He prefers to speak merely against "mechanical" theories of inspiration, the theory of "dictation," the "superstitious use of the Bible as a talisman," or the like. It all sounds very harmless to the plain man. Nonetheless, the liberal preacher says that the Bible is "divine" — indeed that it is the more divine because it is the more human. What could be more edifying than that? But of course such appearances are deceptive. A Bible that is full of error would only be divine in the modern pantheizing sense of "divine." According to this view, God is just another name for the course of the world with all its imperfections and all its sin. But the God whom the Christian worships is a God of truth.

It must be admitted that many Christians do not accept the doctrine of plenary inspiration. That doctrine is denied not only by liberal opponents of Christianity, but also by many true Christian men. There are many in the modern Church who find that the origin of Christianity was no mere product of evolution, but a real entrance of the creative power of God. They believe that their

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<sup>21</sup> It is not denied that there are some persons in the modern Church who do neglect the context of Bible quotations, and who do ignore the human characteristics of the Biblical writers. But this defective way of using the Bible is attributed in an entirely unwarrantable manner, by insinuation at least, to the great body of those who yet held to the inspiration of Scripture.

salvation does not at all depend upon their own efforts to lead the Christ life, but upon the atoning blood of Christ. Thus they accept the central message of the Bible, and yet they believe that the message has come to us merely on the authority of trustworthy witnesses, who were unaided in their literary work by any supernatural guidance of the Spirit of God. There are many who believe that the Bible is correct at the central point, in its account of the redeeming work of Christ, and yet they believe that it contains many errors. Such men are not really liberals, but Christians. That is because they have accepted the message upon which Christianity depends as true. A great gulf separates them from those who reject the supernatural act of God on which Christianity stands or falls.

However, it is another question whether this mediating view of the Bible is logically tenable. The trouble is that our Lord Himself seems to have held the high view of the Bible which is being rejected here. Certainly it is another question whether the panic about the Bible, which gives rise to such concessions, is at all justified by the facts. This writer believes it is not. If the Christian makes full use of his Christian privileges, he finds the seat of authority in the *whole* Bible. He regards it as no mere word of man, but as the very Word of God.

The view of modern liberalism is very different. The modern liberal rejects not only the doctrine of plenary inspiration, but he even rejects the kind of respect for the Bible that would be proper for any ordinarily trustworthy book. What is substituted for the Christian view of the Bible? What does the liberal see as the seat of authority in religion?<sup>22</sup>

The impression is sometimes given that the modern liberal substitutes the authority of Christ for the authority of the Bible. He says that he cannot accept what he regards as the perverse moral teaching of the Old Testament, or the sophistical arguments of Paul. But he regards himself as being the true Christian because, rejecting the rest of the Bible, he depends upon Jesus alone.

This impression is utterly false. The modern liberal does not really hold to the authority of Jesus. Even if he did, he would still greatly impoverish his knowledge of God and the way of salvation. The words of Jesus, spoken during His earthly ministry, could hardly contain all that we need to know about God, and about the way of salvation. For the meaning of Jesus' redeeming work could hardly be fully presented before that work was done. It could be presented through prophecy. As a matter of fact, it was presented this way by Jesus in the days of His flesh. But naturally, the full explanation could be given only after the work was done. This was actually the divine method. It is an insult not only to the Spirit of God, but also to Jesus Himself, to regard the teaching of the Holy Spirit, given through the apostles, as at all inferior in authority to the teaching of Jesus.

However, the modern liberal does not even hold fast to the authority of Jesus. Certainly he does not accept the words of Jesus as they are recorded in the Gospels. Among the recorded words of Jesus are found the things which are most abhorrent to the modern liberal Church. In His recorded words, Jesus points forward to the fuller revelation which would afterwards be given through His apostles. Evidently, therefore, those words of Jesus which modern liberalism regards as authoritative must first be selected by a critical process from the mass of the recorded words. The critical process is certainly very difficult. The suspicion often arises that the critic retains as genuine only those words of the historical Jesus which conform to his own preconceived ideas. But even after the sifting process has been completed, the liberal scholar is still unable to accept

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<sup>22</sup> For what follows, compare "For Christ or Against Him," in *The Presbyterian*, for January 20, 1921, p. 9.

all the sayings of Jesus as authoritative. He must finally admit that even the "historical" Jesus (as reconstructed by modern historians) said some things that are untrue.

So much is usually admitted. But it is still maintained that, although not everything that Jesus said is true, His central "life-purpose" is still regarded as regulative for the Church. What then was the life-purpose of Jesus? According to the shortest, and if modern criticism is accepted, the earliest of the Gospels, the Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Here, the vicarious death is put as the "life-purpose" of Jesus. Such an utterance must of course be pushed aside by the modern liberal Church. The truth is that the life-purpose of Jesus discovered by modern liberalism is not the life purpose of the real Jesus. It merely represents those elements in the teaching of Jesus — isolated and misinterpreted — which happen to agree with the modern program. It is not Jesus, then, who is the real authority, but the modern principle by which the selection within Jesus' recorded teaching has been made. Certain isolated ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount are accepted because they agree with modern ideas, not at all because they are Jesus' teachings.

It is not true at all that modern liberalism is based upon the authority of Jesus. It rejects a vast deal that is absolutely essential in Jesus' example and teaching — notably His consciousness of being the heavenly Messiah. For liberalism, the real authority can only be "the Christian consciousness" or "Christian experience." How will the findings of the Christian consciousness be established? Surely not by a majority vote of the organized Church. Such a method would obviously do away with liberty of conscience. The only authority, then, would be individual experience. Truth would only be what "helps" the individual man. Such authority is obviously no authority at all, for individual experience is endlessly diverse. Once truth is regarded as something that works only at a particular time, or for a particular person, it ceases to be truth. The result is abysmal skepticism.

The Christian man, on the other hand, finds the very Word of God in the Bible. Do not let it be said that dependence upon a book is a dead or artificial thing. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was founded upon the authority of the Bible, yet it set the world aflame. Dependence upon a word of man is slavery, but dependence upon God's word is life. The world would be dark and gloomy if we were left to our own devices, and had no blessed Word of God. To the Christian, the Bible is not a burdensome law, but the very Magna Charta of Christian liberty.

It is no wonder, then, that liberalism is totally different from Christianity. The foundation is different. Christianity is founded on the Bible. It bases both its thinking and its life on the Bible. Liberalism, on the other hand, is founded on the shifting emotions of sinful men.

## Chapter 5: "Christ"

Three points of difference between liberalism and Christianity have been noticed so far. The two religions differ with regard to their presuppositions of the Christian message, their view of God and man, and their estimate of the Book in which the message is contained. It is not surprising, then, that they differ fundamentally with regard to the message itself. But before considering the message, we must consider the Person upon whom the message is based. The Person is Jesus. In their attitude toward Jesus, liberalism and Christianity are sharply opposed.

The Christian attitude toward Jesus appears in the whole New Testament. In examining the New Testament witness, it has become customary in recent years to begin with the Epistles of Paul.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This method of approach has been followed by the present writer in *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921.

This custom is sometimes based upon error; it is sometimes based upon the view that the Epistles of Paul are "primary" sources of information, while the Gospels are considered "secondary." As a matter of fact, the Gospels, as well as the Epistles, are primary sources of the highest possible value. But the custom of beginning with Paul is at least convenient. This is due to the large measure of agreement which prevails with regard to the Pauline Epistles.

There is debate about the date and authorship of the Gospels. But all serious historians, whether Christian or non-Christian, are agreed about the authorship and approximate date of Paul's principal epistles. It is universally admitted that the chief of the extant epistles attributed to Paul were really written by a man of the first Christian generation, someone who was a contemporary of Jesus and had personal contact with certain of Jesus' intimate friends. What, then, was the attitude of this representative of the first Christian generation toward Jesus of Nazareth?

The answer cannot be in doubt at all. It is clear that the apostle Paul always stood in a truly religious relationship toward Jesus. For Paul, Jesus was not merely an *example* for faith. He was primarily the *object* of faith. The religion of Paul did not consist in having faith in God, like the faith which Jesus had in God. It consisted rather in having faith in Jesus. An appeal to Jesus' example is not absent from the Pauline Epistles, and certainly it was not absent from Paul's life. Paul found Jesus' example not merely in the acts of incarnation and atonement, but even in Jesus' daily life in Palestine. We should avoid exaggeration in this matter. Plainly, Paul knew far more about the life of Jesus than he has seen fit to tell in the Epistles. Plainly, the Epistles do not begin to contain all the instruction which Paul gave to the Churches at the commencement of their Christian life. But even after exaggerations have been avoided, the fact is significant enough. The plain fact is, that imitating Jesus, important though it was for Paul, was swallowed up by something far more important still. The primary thing for Paul was not Jesus' example, but his redeeming work. The religion of Paul was not primarily faith in God, like Jesus' faith. It was faith in Jesus. Paul committed the eternal destinies of his soul to Jesus without reserve. That is what we mean when we say that Paul stood in a truly religious relation to Jesus.

But Paul was not the first to stand in this religious relation to Jesus. Evidently, at this decisive point, he was only continuing an attitude toward Jesus that had already been assumed by those who had been Christians before him. Paul was not led to assume that attitude by the persuasions of the earlier disciples. He was converted by the Lord Himself on the road to Damascus. But, in its essentials, the faith induced then was like the faith which had already prevailed among the earlier disciples. Indeed, an account of the redeeming work of Christ is designated by Paul as something that he "received." Evidently in the primitive Church, that account had already been accompanied by trust in the Redeemer. Paul was not the first to have faith in Jesus, as distinguished from faith in God, like the faith which Jesus had. Paul was not the first to make Jesus the object of faith.

So much will no doubt be admitted by all. But who were the predecessors of Paul in making Jesus the object of faith? The obvious answer has always been that they were the primitive disciples in Jerusalem. That answer stands abundantly firm. A strange attempt has been made in recent years, by Bousset and Heitmüller, to cast doubt on it. What Paul "received," it has been suggested, was received from Christian communities such as the one at Antioch, not from the primitive Church at Jerusalem. But this attempt to interpose an extra link between the Jerusalem Church and Paul has resulted in failure. The Epistles provide abundant information about Paul's relations to Jerusalem.

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Paul was deeply interested in the Jerusalem Church. His Judaizing opponents appealed to the original apostles against him in certain matters. He emphasizes his agreement with Peter and the rest in opposition to them. But even the Judaizers had no objection to the way Paul regarded Jesus as the object of faith. There is not the least suspicion of any debate in the Epistles about the matter. There was discussion about the place of the Mosaic law in the Christian life. Even with regard to that matter, the Judaizers were entirely unjustified in appealing to the original apostles against Paul. But with regard to his attitude toward Jesus, the original apostles evidently did not give them even the slightest pretense for an appeal against Paul's teaching. In making Jesus the object of religious faith — the thing that was the heart and soul of Paul's religion — Paul was not in disagreement with those who had been apostles before him. Had there been such disagreement, the "right hand of fellowship," that the pillars of the Jerusalem Church gave to Paul (Gal. 2:9), would have been impossible. The facts are really too plain. The whole of early Christian history is a hopeless riddle unless the Jerusalem Church, as well as Paul, made Jesus the object of religious faith. Primitive Christianity certainly did not consist in the mere imitation of Jesus.

But was this "faith in Jesus" justified by Jesus' own teaching? The question has really been answered in Chapter 2. It was shown there that Jesus most certainly did not keep His Person out of His gospel. On the contrary, he presented Himself as the Savior of men. The demonstration of that fact was the highest merit of the late James Denney. His work on "Jesus and the Gospel" is faulty in some respects, and marred by undue concessions toward some modern types of criticism. But its main thesis stands all the more firm because these concessions. Denney has shown that no matter what view is taken of the sources underlying the Gospels, and no matter what elements in the Gospels are rejected as secondary, the supposed "historical Jesus" (as He is left after the critical process is done) plainly presented Himself as the *object* of faith, and not merely as an *example* for faith.

It may be added, moreover, that Jesus did not invite confidence by minimizing the load He offered to bear. He did not say, "Trust me to give you acceptance with God because it is not difficult. God does not regard sin so seriously after all." On the contrary, Jesus presented the wrath of God in a more awful way than it was presented afterwards by His disciples. Modern liberals represent Jesus as a mild-mannered exponent of a non-discriminating love. And yet it was Jesus who spoke of the outer darkness and the everlasting fire, of the sin that shall not be forgiven either in this world or the next. There is nothing in Jesus' teaching about the character of God that in itself can evoke trust. On the contrary, this awful presentation can only give rise to despair in the hearts of us sinners. Trust arises only when we attend to God's way of salvation. And that way is found in Jesus. Jesus did not invite the confidence of men by minimizing what was necessary for sinners to stand faultless before the awful throne of God. On the contrary, he invited confidence by presenting His own wondrous Person. Great was the guilt of sin, but Jesus was greater still. According to Jesus, God is a loving Father. But He is a loving Father, not of the sinful world, but of those whom He had brought into His Kingdom through the Son.

The truth is, the New Testament is an absolutely unitary witness with regard to Jesus as the object of faith. The thing is rooted far too deep in the records of primitive Christianity to ever be removed by any critical process. The Jesus spoken of in the New Testament was no mere teacher of righteousness, and no mere pioneer in a new type of religious life. He was the One who was regarded, and regarded Himself, as the Savior whom men could trust.

But modern liberalism regards Him in a totally different way. Christians stand in a religious relation to Jesus. Liberals do not stand in a religious relation to Jesus. What difference could be

more profound than that? The modern liberal preacher reverences Jesus. He forever has the name of Jesus on his lips. He speaks of Jesus as the supreme revelation of God. He enters, or tries to enter, into the religious life of Jesus, but he does not stand in a religious relation to him. For the liberal, Jesus is an example for faith, not the object of faith. The modern liberal tries to have faith in God like the faith which he supposes Jesus had in God; but he does not have faith in Jesus.

In other words, according to modern liberalism, Jesus was the Founder of Christianity because He was the first Christian. And Christianity consists in maintaining the religious life which Jesus instituted.

But was Jesus really a Christian? Or, to put the question another way, can we or should we as Christians make Jesus our example and experience in every respect? Certain difficulties arise with regard to this question.

The first difficulty appears in the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. The Person whom we are asked to take as our example thought that He was the heavenly Son of Man, and that he was to be the final Judge of all the earth. Can we imitate Him there? The trouble is not merely that Jesus undertook a special mission which can never be ours. That difficulty might conceivably be overcome by adapting the kind of character which He displayed to our own station in life. But another difficulty is more serious. The real trouble is that this lofty claim of Jesus places a moral stain upon his character, if the claim was indeed unjustified, as modern liberalism believes. What would be thought of someone who lapsed so far from the path of humility and sanity as to believe that the eternal destinies of the world were committed into His hands? The truth is, if Jesus is merely an example, He is not a worthy example, for He claimed to be far more.

Modern liberalism usually attempts to palliate this objection. It is said that the Messianic consciousness arose late in Jesus' experience, and it was not really fundamental. What was really fundamental, the liberal historians continue, was the consciousness of his sonship toward God — a consciousness which may be shared by every humble disciple. The Messianic consciousness, in this view, arose only as an afterthought. It is said that Jesus was conscious of standing in a relation of untroubled sonship toward God. But He discovered that this relation was not shared by others. He became aware, therefore, of a mission to bring others into the place of privilege that He already occupied Himself. That mission made Him unique. To express His uniqueness, He adopted the faulty category of Messiahship late in His life, and almost against His will.

Many forms of such psychological reconstruction of the life of Jesus have been presented in recent years. The modern world has devoted its very best literary efforts to this task. But the efforts have resulted in failure. In the first place, there is no real evidence that the reconstructed Jesus is historical. The sources know nothing of a Jesus who adopted the category of Messiahship late in life and against His will. On the contrary, the only Jesus that they present is a Jesus who based His whole ministry on His stupendous claim. In the second place, even if the modern reconstruction were historical, it would not solve the problem at all. The problem is a moral and psychological problem. How can a human being who lapsed so far from the path of rectitude as to think Himself to be the judge of all the earth — how can such a human being be regarded as the supreme example for mankind? It is absolutely no answer to the objection to say that Jesus accepted the category of Messiahship reluctantly and late in life. No matter *when* He succumbed to this temptation, the outstanding fact is that, in this view, He did succumb. And that moral defeat places an indelible stain on His character. No doubt it is possible to make excuses for Him, and the liberal historians in fact make many of them. But what becomes of liberalism's claim to be truly Christian? If

excuses have to be made for him, how can such a man be regarded as having a relationship to his modern critics that is even remotely analogous to the one that Jesus of the New Testament has to the Christian Church?

There is another difficulty in regarding Jesus as simply the first Christian. This second difficulty concerns Jesus' attitude toward sin. If Jesus is separated from us by his Messianic consciousness, He is separated from us even more fundamentally by the absence in Him of a sense of sin.

With respect to the sinlessness of Jesus, modern liberal historians find themselves in a quandary. Affirming that He was sinless makes it much harder to defend the religion that liberal historians are anxious to preserve. It involves hazardous assumptions regarding the nature of sin. If sin is merely imperfection, how can we absolutely negate it and still remain within a process of nature that is supposed to be ever changing and ever advancing? The very idea of "sinlessness," much more its reality, requires us to conceive of sin as the transgression of a fixed law, or a fixed standard. It involves the conception of an absolute goodness. But the modern evolutionary view of the world has no right to conceive of an absolute goodness. At any rate, if such absolute goodness is allowed to intrude at a definite point in the present world-process, then we are involved in supernaturalism. As will be observed later, this is the very thing that the modern reconstruction of Christianity is most anxious to avoid. Once you affirm that Jesus was sinless and all other men are sinful, you enter into irreconcilable conflict with the whole modern point of view. If there are scientific objections to affirming the sinlessness of Jesus from the liberal point of view, there are also very obvious religious objections to affirming His sinfulness — there are difficulties for modern liberalism as well as for the theology of the historic Church. If Jesus was sinful like other men, the last remnant of his uniqueness would seem to have disappeared. All continuity with the previous development of Christianity would seem to be destroyed.

In the face of this quandary, the modern liberal historian is inclined to avoid rash assertions. He will not be sure that when Jesus taught His disciples to say, "Forgive us our debts," He did not pray that prayer *with* them. On the other hand, he will not really face the results that logically follow from his doubt. In his perplexity, he is apt to be content with the assertion that, whether Jesus was sinless or not, He was immeasurably above the rest of us. We will probably be told that whether Jesus was "sinless" is an academic question. It concerns the mysteries of the absolute. What we need to do is bow in simple reverence before a holiness that is a white light in a dark place compared to our impurity.

Such avoidance of the difficulty is unsatisfactory. Obviously the liberal theologian is trying to obtain the religious advantages of affirming Jesus' sinlessness at the same time that he obtains the supposed scientific advantages of its denial. But for the moment we are not concerned with the question at all. We are not concerned with determining whether Jesus was sinless or not, as a matter of fact. What we need to observe now is that He displays no consciousness of sin in the record of His life that has actually come into our hands. Even if the words "Why do you call me good?"<sup>24</sup> meant that Jesus denied the attribute of goodness to Himself — which they do not — it would still remain true that in His recorded words, He never deals in any intelligible way with sin in His own life. In the account of the temptation<sup>25</sup> we are told how He kept sin from entering, but never how

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<sup>24</sup> Matt. 19:17

<sup>25</sup> Lk. 4:1

He dealt with it after its entrance had been effected. In other words, Jesus' religious experience, as recorded in the Gospels, gives us no information about the way in which sin shall be removed.

Yet in the Gospels Jesus is constantly represented as dealing with the problem of sin. He always assumes that other men are sinful, yet He never finds sin in Himself. A stupendous difference is found here between Jesus' experience and ours.

That difference prevents the religious experience of Jesus from serving as the sole basis of the Christian life. For clearly, if Christianity is anything, it is a way of getting rid of sin. If it is not that, then it is useless, for all men have sinned. And as a matter of fact, it was just that from the very beginning. Whether Christian preaching began on the day of Pentecost or when Jesus first taught in Galilee, one of its first words was "Repent."<sup>26</sup> Throughout the whole New Testament, the Christianity of the primitive Church is represented clearly as a way of getting rid of sin. But if Christianity is a way of getting rid of sin, then Jesus was not a Christian. For Jesus, as far as we can see, had no sin to get rid of.

Why then did the early Christians call themselves disciples of Jesus? Why did they connect themselves with His name? The answer is not difficult. They connected themselves with His name not because He was their example in ridding themselves of sin, but because their method of ridding themselves of sin was by means of Him. It was what Jesus did for them, and not primarily the example of His own life, that made them Christians. Such is the witness of all our primitive records. The record is fullest, as already observed, in the case of the Apostle Paul. Clearly Paul regarded himself as saved from sin by what Jesus did for him on the cross. But Paul did not stand alone. "Christ died for our sin" was not something that Paul originated; it was something he "received." The benefits of that saving work of Christ, according to the primitive Church, were to be received by faith. Even if the classic formulation of this conviction should prove to be Paul's, the conviction itself clearly goes back to the very beginning. The primitive Christians felt themselves in need of salvation. How, they asked, can the load of sin be removed? Their answer is perfectly plain. They simply trusted Jesus to remove it. In other words they had "faith" in Him.

Here again we are brought face to face with the significant fact which was noticed at the beginning of this chapter. The early Christians regarded Jesus not merely as an *example* for faith but primarily as the *object* of faith. From the beginning, Christianity was a means of getting rid of sin by trust in Jesus of Nazareth. If Jesus was the object of Christian faith, He was no more a Christian than God is a religious being. God is the object of all religion. He is absolutely necessary to all religion. But He is the only being in the universe who can never be religious in His own nature. So it is with Jesus in relation to Christian faith. Christian faith is trust reposed in Him for the removal of sin. He could not repose trust in Himself in the sense that we are concerned with here. Therefore, He was certainly not a Christian. If we are looking for a complete illustration of the Christian life, we cannot find it in Jesus' own religious experience.

This conclusion needs to be guarded against two objections.

In the first place, it will be said that we are failing to do justice to the true humanity of Jesus, which is affirmed by the creeds of the Church as well as by modern theologians. When we say that Jesus could not illustrate Christian faith any more than God can be religious, we deny to Jesus the religious experience that is a necessary element in true humanity. If He is truly man, it is said, Jesus must have been more than the object of religious faith; He must have had a religion of His

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<sup>26</sup> Matt. 4:17, Acts 2:38

own. The answer is not far to seek. Certainly Jesus had a religion of His own. His prayer was real prayer. His faith was real religious faith. His relation to His heavenly Father was not merely that of a child to a father; it was that of a man to his God. Certainly Jesus had a religion. Without it, His humanity would indeed have been incomplete. Without a doubt, Jesus had a religion; the fact is of the utmost importance. But it is equally important to observe that the religion Jesus had was not Christianity. Christianity is a way of getting rid of sin, and Jesus was without sin. His religion was a religion of Paradise, not a religion of sinful humanity. It was a religion to which we may attain in heaven perhaps, when the process of our purification is complete (though even then the memory of redemption will never leave us). But certainly, it is not a religion with which we can begin. The religion of Jesus was a religion of untroubled sonship. Christianity is a religion of attaining sonship by the redeeming work of Christ.

In the second place, it will be said, if it is true that Jesus is so far removed from us, then in our view He is no longer our Brother and our Example. This objection is welcome, because it helps us to avoid misunderstandings and exaggerations.

Certainly if the greatness and uniqueness of Jesus meant that He could no longer feel our infirmities,<sup>27</sup> the result would be disastrous. Jesus' coming would lose much of its significance. But likeness is not always necessary to nearness. The experience of a father in his personal relation to his son is quite different from that of the son in his relation to his father. That very difference binds father and son all the more closely together. The father cannot share the specifically filial affection of the son, and the son cannot share the specifically paternal affection of the father. Yet no mere relationship of brotherhood could be quite so close. Fatherhood and sonship are complementary to each other; hence their dissimilarity; but also their closeness. It may be somewhat the same in our relationship to Jesus. If He were exactly the same as us, and if He were merely our Brother, then we would not be nearly so close to Him as we are when He is our Savior.

Nevertheless, Jesus is a Brother to us as well as a Savior — an elder Brother in whose steps we may follow. The imitation of Jesus has a fundamental place in Christian life. It is perfectly correct to represent Him as our supreme and only perfect example.

As far as the field of ethics is concerned, there can be no dispute. No matter what view may be taken of His origin and His higher nature, Jesus certainly led a true human life. And in that life He came into those varied human relationships which provide opportunity for moral achievement. His life of perfect purity was led in no cold aloofness from the throng and press. His unselfish love was exercised not merely in mighty deeds, but in acts of kindness. The humblest of us has the power to imitate them, if only we had the will. The indefinable impression of the whole is also more effective than all the details. Jesus is felt to be far greater than any of His individual words or deeds. His calmness, unselfishness, and strength have been the wonder of the ages. The world can never lose the inspiration of that radiant example.

Moreover, Jesus is an example not merely for the relation of man to man, but also for the relation of man to God. Imitating Him must extend to the sphere of religion as well as ethics. Indeed, religion and ethics in Him were never separated. No single element in His life can be understood without reference to His heavenly Father. Jesus was the most religious man who ever lived. He did nothing, and said nothing, and thought nothing, without the thought of God. If His example means anything at all it means that a human life without the conscious presence of God is a

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<sup>27</sup> Heb. 4:15

monstrous perversion — even though it is a life of humanitarian service outwardly like the ministry of Jesus. If we would truly follow in Jesus' steps, we must obey the first commandment as well as the second that is like it<sup>28</sup> — we must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The difference between Jesus and ourselves serves only to enforce the lesson, not invalidate it. If the One to whom all power was given needed refreshment and strengthening in prayer, then we need it more. If the One to whom the lilies of the field revealed the glory of God went into the sanctuary, then surely we need such assistance even more than He. If the wise and holy One could say "Your will be done," then surely submission is more applicable for us, whose wisdom is like the foolishness of children.

Thus Jesus is the supreme example for men. But the Jesus who can serve as an example is not the Jesus of modern liberal reconstruction. To modern liberalism, he is only the Jesus of the New Testament. The Jesus of modern liberalism advanced stupendous claims which were not founded upon fact — such conduct should never be made a norm. All through His ministry, the Jesus of modern liberalism employed language that was extravagant and absurd. It is only hoped that imitating Him will not lead to equal extravagance in His modern disciples. If the Jesus of naturalistic reconstruction were really taken as an example, disaster would soon follow. However, the modern liberal does not really take the Jesus of the liberal historians as his example. What he really does in practice is to manufacture his example. He creates a simple exponent of a non-doctrinal religion. Even the abler historians of his own school know that such an example never existed, except in the imagination of modern men.

Imitating the real Jesus is very different — that is, the Jesus of the New Testament who actually lived in the first century of our era. That Jesus advanced lofty claims which were sober truth, instead of being the extravagant dreams of an enthusiast. On His lips, language that would be frenzied or absurd coming from the reduced Jesus of modern reconstruction, becomes filled with blessing for mankind. Jesus demanded that those who followed Him be willing to break even the holiest ties. He said, "If a man comes to me and does not hate his father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple,"<sup>29</sup> and "Let the dead bury their dead."<sup>30</sup> Coming from the mere prophet constructed by modern liberalism, those words would be monstrous. Coming from the real Jesus, they are sublime. How great was the mission of mercy which justified such words! And how wonderful the condescension of the eternal Son! How matchless an example for the children of men! Paul might well appeal to the example of the incarnate Savior saying, "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."<sup>31</sup> Imitating the real Jesus will never lead a man astray.

The example of Jesus is a perfect example only if He was justified in what He offered to men. And He did not offer guidance primarily, but salvation. He presented Himself as the object of men's faith. That offer is rejected by modern liberalism, but it is accepted by Christian men.

There is a profound difference in the attitude assumed by modern liberalism toward Jesus the Lord, and the one assumed by Christianity. Liberalism regards Him as an Example and Guide. Christianity regards Him as a Savior. Liberalism makes Him an example for faith. Christianity makes him the object of faith.

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<sup>28</sup> Matt. 22:37-39

<sup>29</sup> Lk. 14:26

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 8:22

<sup>31</sup> Phil. 2:5

This profound difference in attitude toward Jesus depends upon who Jesus was. If Jesus was only what liberal historians suppose He was, then trust in Him would be out of place. Our attitude toward Him would be that of pupils to a Master and nothing more. But if He was what the New Testament represents Him as being, then we can safely commit to Him the eternal destinies of our souls. What then is the difference between liberalism and Christianity with regard to the person of our Lord?

The answer might be difficult to set forth in detail. But the essential thing can be put almost in a word — liberalism regards Jesus as the fairest flower of humanity; Christianity regards Him as a supernatural Person.

The conception of Jesus as a supernatural Person runs all through the New Testament. In the Epistles of Paul, of course, it is quite clear. Without the slightest doubt, Paul separated Jesus from ordinary humanity and placed Him on the side of God. The words in Gal. 1:1, "not from men nor through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead," are only typical of what appears everywhere in the Epistles. The same contrast between Jesus Christ and ordinary humanity is everywhere presupposed. Paul does indeed call Jesus Christ a man. But the way in which he speaks of Jesus as a man only deepens the impression which has already been received. Paul speaks of the humanity of Jesus as though there is something strange, something wonderful about the fact that Jesus was a man. At any rate, the really outstanding fact is that in the Epistles of Paul, Jesus is everywhere separated from ordinary humanity; the deity of Christ is everywhere presupposed. It is a matter of small consequence whether Paul ever applies to Jesus the Greek word which is translated "God" in the English Bible. Certainly it is very difficult, in view of Rom. 9:5, to deny that he does.<sup>32</sup> However that may be, the term "Lord," which is Paul's regular designation of Jesus, is really just as much a designation of deity as the term "God." It was a designation of deity even in the pagan religions with which Paul's converts were familiar. What is far more important in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was current in Paul's day and used by the Apostle himself, the term was used to translate the word "Jahwe" of the Hebrew text. Paul does not hesitate to apply to Jesus stupendous passages in the Greek Old Testament where the term Lord thus designates the God of Israel. What is perhaps most significant of all to establish the Pauline teaching about the Person of Christ, is that Paul everywhere stands in a religious attitude toward Jesus. One who is thus the object of religious faith is surely no mere man, but a supernatural Person, and indeed a Person who was God.<sup>33</sup>

Thus Paul regarded Jesus as a supernatural Person. The fact would be surprising even if it stood alone. Paul was a contemporary of Jesus. What must this Jesus have been to be so quickly lifted above the limits of ordinary humanity and placed on the side of God?

But there is something far more surprising still. The truly surprising thing is that the view which Paul had of Jesus was also the view held by Jesus' intimate friends.<sup>34</sup> This fact appears in the Pauline Epistles, to say nothing of other evidence. Clearly the Epistles presuppose a fundamental unity between Paul and the original apostles with regard to the Person of Christ. If there had been

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<sup>32</sup> Rom 9:5, "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." KJV

<sup>33</sup> The obvious objection here is that Paul and the other disciples were mistaken in their perception. But Machen is not attempting to prove that Jesus is God, only that biblical Christianity perceives him as such.

<sup>34</sup> Compare *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, pp. 118-137.

any controversy about this matter it would certainly have been mentioned elsewhere. Even the Judaizers, Paul's bitter opponents, seem to have had no objection to Paul's conception of Jesus as a supernatural Person. The really impressive thing about Paul's view of Christ is that it is not defended. Indeed it is hardly presented in the Epistles in any systematic way. Yet it is everywhere presupposed. The inference is perfectly plain — Paul's conception of the Person of Christ was a matter of course in the primitive Church. With regard to this matter, Paul appears in perfect harmony with all Palestinian Christians. The men who had walked and talked with Jesus, and had seen Him subject to the petty limitations of earthly life, fully agreed with Paul in regarding Him as a supernatural Person, seated on the throne of all Being.

Exactly the same account of Jesus presupposed by the Pauline Epistles appears in the detailed narrative of the Gospels. The Gospels agree with Paul in presenting Jesus as a supernatural Person. And the agreement appears not in one or two of the Gospels, but in all four. The day is long past when the Gospel of John, as presenting a divine Jesus, could be contrasted with the Gospel of Mark, as presenting a human Jesus. On the contrary, all four Gospels clearly present a Person lifted far above the level of ordinary humanity. The Gospel of Mark, the shortest and according to modern criticism the earliest of the Gospels, renders Jesus' superhuman works of power particularly prominent. In all four Gospels, Jesus appears possessed of a sovereign power over the forces of nature. In all four Gospels, as in the whole of the New Testament, He clearly appears as a supernatural Person.<sup>35</sup>

But what is meant by a "supernatural Person"; what is meant by the supernatural?

The conception of the "supernatural" is closely connected with that of "miracle"; a miracle is the supernatural manifesting itself in the external world. But what is the supernatural? Many definitions have been proposed, but only one definition is really correct. A supernatural event is one that takes place by the immediate, as distinguished from the mediate, power of God. The possibility of the supernatural, if supernatural is defined in this way, presupposes two things — it presupposes (1) the existence of a personal God, and (2) the existence of a real order of nature. Without the existence of a personal God, there could be no purposive entrance of God's power into the order of the world. And without the real existence of an order of nature, there could be no distinction between natural events and those that are above nature — all events would be supernatural. Otherwise, the word "supernatural" would have no meaning at all. The distinction between "natural" and "supernatural" does not mean that nature is independent of God. It does not mean that while God brings to pass supernatural events, natural events are not brought to pass by Him. On the contrary, the believer in the supernatural regards everything that is done as being the work of God. Only, he believes that in natural events, God uses means, whereas in supernatural events He uses no means, but directly exercises His creative power. The distinction between the natural and the supernatural, in other words, is simply the distinction between God's works of providence, and God's work of creation. A miracle is a work of creation just as truly as the mysterious act which produced the world.

This conception of the supernatural depends absolutely upon a theistic view of God. Theism is to be distinguished (1) from deism and (2) from pantheism.

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<sup>35</sup> Compare "[History and Faith](#)," 1915, pp. 5f.

According to the deistic view, God set the world going like a machine and then left it independent of Himself. Such a view is inconsistent with the actuality of the supernatural. The miracles of the Bible presuppose a God who is constantly watching over and guiding the course of this world. The miracles of the Bible are not arbitrary intrusions of a Power that is without relation to the world. They are evidently intended to accomplish results within the order of nature. Indeed, the natural and the supernatural are blended in the miracles of the Bible in a way that is entirely incongruous with the deistic conception of God. In the feeding of the five thousand, for example, who shall say what part the five loaves and two fishes had in the event? Who shall say where the natural left off and the supernatural began? Yet that event, if any, surely transcended the order of nature. The miracles of the Bible, then, are not the work of a God who has no part in the course of nature. They are the work of a God who is "preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions" through His works of providence.<sup>36</sup>

The conception of the supernatural is inconsistent with pantheism as well as deism. Pantheism identifies God with the totality of nature. It is inconceivable, then, in the pantheistic view that anything would enter into the course of nature from outside. A similar incongruity with the supernatural also appears in certain forms of idealism, which deny that the forces of nature have any real existence. If what seems to be connected in nature is really only connected in the divine mind, then it is difficult to make any distinction between those operations of the divine mind which appear as miracles, and those which appear as natural events. Again, it has often been said that all events are works of creation. In this view, it is only a concession to popular phraseology to say that one body is attracted toward another in accordance with a law of gravitation. What really ought to be said is that when two bodies are in proximity under certain conditions they come together. Certain phenomena in nature, in this view, are always followed by certain other phenomena. It is really only this regularity of sequence that is indicated by the assertion that the former phenomena "cause" the latter. The only real cause in all cases is God. On the basis of this view, there can be no distinction between events wrought by the immediate power of God and those that are not, for all events are wrought this way. Against such a view, those who accept our definition of miracle will naturally accept the common-sense notion of cause. God is always the first cause, but there are truly second causes. And these second causes are the means which God uses in the ordinary course of the world to accomplish His ends. The exclusion of such second causes makes an event a miracle.

It is sometimes said that if miracles were actual, it would destroy the basis of science. Science, it is said, is founded upon the regularity of sequences. Science assumes that if certain conditions within the course of nature are given, then certain other conditions will always follow. But if any events intrude that are independent of all previous conditions, then, it is said, the regularity of nature on which science bases itself is broken up. Miracle, in other words, seems to introduce an element of arbitrariness and unaccountability into the course of the world.

The objection ignores what is really fundamental to the Christian conception of miracle. According to the Christian conception, a miracle is wrought by the immediate power of God. It is not wrought by an arbitrary and fantastic despot, but by the very God to whom the regularity of nature is due — by the God whose character is known through the Bible. We may be sure that such a God will not do insult to the reason that He has given to His creatures. His interposition will introduce no disorder into the world that He has made. According to the Christian conception, there is nothing

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<sup>36</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.18

arbitrary about a miracle. It is not an uncaused event, but an event that is caused by the very source of all the order that is in the world. It is completely dependent on the least arbitrary, and the most firmly fixed, of all things — namely, the character of God.

The possibility of miracle, then, is indissolubly joined with "theism." Once you admit the existence of a personal God, Maker and Ruler of the world, no limits can be set to the creative power of such a God, temporal or otherwise. If you admit that God once created the world, then you cannot deny that He might engage in creation again. But it will be said that the possibility of miracles is different from the actuality of miracles. They might conceivably occur, but have they actually occurred?

This question looms very large in the minds of modern men. The burden of the question seems to rest heavily even upon many who accept the miracles of the New Testament. The miracles used to be regarded as an aid to faith, but now they are a hindrance to faith. Faith used to result from the miracles, but now it comes despite them. Men used to believe in Jesus because He wrought miracles, but now we accept the miracles because we have come to believe in Him on other grounds.

A strange confusion underlies this common way of speaking. In one sense, certainly, miracles are a hindrance to faith — but who ever thought the contrary? It may certainly be admitted that if the New Testament narrative had no miracles in it, it would be far easier to believe. The more commonplace a story is, the easier it is to accept it as true. But commonplace narratives have little value. The New Testament without the miracles would be far easier to believe. But the trouble is, it would not be worth believing. Without the miracles, the New Testament would contain an account of a holy man — not a perfect man. Without them, He may have been far holier than the rest of men, but He would have no right to make his lofty claims. What benefit would such a man be to us, and the death which marked His failure? The loftier the example Jesus set, the greater our sorrow at our failure to attain to it, and the greater our hopelessness under the burden of sin. The sage of Nazareth may satisfy those who have never faced the problem of evil in their own lives, but to talk about an ideal to those who are under the bondage of sin is a cruel mockery. Yet, if Jesus was merely a man like the rest of men, then an ideal is all that we have in Him. Far more is needed by a sinful world. It is small comfort to be told that there was goodness in the world, when what we need is goodness that is triumphant over sin. But goodness that is triumphant over sin involves an entrance of the creative power of God. And that creative power of God is manifested by the miracles. Without the miracles, the New Testament might be easier to believe, but what would be believed would be entirely different from what presents itself to us now. Without the miracles, we would have a teacher; with the miracles we have a Savior.

Certainly it is a mistake to isolate the miracles from the rest of the New Testament. It is a mistake to discuss the question of the resurrection of Jesus as though what is to be proved is simply the resurrection of a certain man of the first century in Palestine. No doubt the existing evidence for such an event, strong as it is, might be insufficient. The historian would be obliged to say that no naturalistic explanation of the origin of the Church has yet been discovered, and so the evidence for the miracle is exceedingly strong. But miracles are extremely unusual events, to say the least, and there is a tremendously hostile presumption against accepting the hypothesis of miracle in any given case. But as a matter of fact, the question in this case does not concern the resurrection of a man about whom we know nothing. It concerns the resurrection of Jesus. And Jesus was certainly a very extraordinary Person. The uniqueness of the character of Jesus removes the hostile presumption against miracle. It was extremely improbable that any ordinary man would rise from the dead, but Jesus was like no other man that ever lived.

The evidence for the miracles of the New Testament is supported in yet another way; it is supported by the existence of an adequate occasion. It has been observed above that a miracle is an event produced by the immediate power of God, and that God is a God of order. The evidence of a miracle is therefore enormously strengthened when the purpose of the miracle can be detected. That does not mean that within a complex of miracles an exact reason must be assigned to every one. It does not mean that in the New Testament we should expect to see exactly why a miracle was wrought in one case and not in another. But it does mean that acceptance of a complex of miracles is made vastly easier when an adequate reason can be detected for the complex as a whole.

In the case of the New Testament miracles, such an adequate reason is not difficult to find. It is found in the conquest of sin. According to the Christian view, as set forth in the Bible, mankind is under the curse of God's holy law. The dreadful penalty includes the corruption of our whole nature. Actual transgressions proceed from the sinful root, and serve to deepen every man's guilt in the sight of God. On the basis of that view, so profound, and so true to the observed facts of life, it is obvious that nothing natural will meet our need. Nature transmits the dreadful taint. Hope is to be sought only in a creative act of God.

And that creative act of God — so mysterious, so contrary to all expectation, yet so congruous with the character of the God who is revealed as the God of love — is found in the redeeming work of Christ. No product of sinful humanity could have redeemed humanity from the dreadful guilt, or lifted a sinful race from the slough of sin. But a Savior has come from God. There lies the very root of the Christian religion. There is the reason why the supernatural is the very ground and substance of the Christian faith.

But the acceptance of the supernatural depends upon a conviction of the reality of sin. Without the conviction of sin there can be no appreciation of the uniqueness of Jesus; it is only when we contrast our sinfulness with His holiness that we appreciate the gulf which separates Him from the rest of the children of men. And without the conviction of sin there can be no understanding of the occasion for the supernatural act of God. Without the conviction of sin, the good news of redemption seems to be an idle tale. The conviction of sin is so fundamental in the Christian faith, that it will not do to arrive at it merely by a process of reasoning. It will not do to merely say, "All men (I am told) are sinners; I am a man; therefore I suppose I must be a sinner too." That is all the supposed conviction of sin amounts to sometimes. True conviction is far more immediate than that. It depends on information that comes from without. It depends on the revelation of the law of God. It depends on the awful truths set forth in the Bible about the universal sinfulness of mankind. It adds a conviction of the whole mind and heart to the revelation that comes from without. It adds a profound understanding of one's own lost condition, and an illumination of the deadened conscience. This causes a Copernican revolution in one's attitude toward the world and toward God. When a man has passed through that experience, he wonders at his former blindness. He especially wonders at his former attitude toward the miracles of the New Testament, and toward the supernatural Person who is revealed there. The truly penitent man glories in the supernatural, for he knows that nothing natural would meet his need. The world has been shaken once in his downfall, and it must be shaken again if he is to be saved.

Accepting the presuppositions of miracle does not render the plain testimony of the miracles that have actually occurred unnecessary. And that testimony is exceedingly strong.<sup>37</sup> The Jesus

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<sup>37</sup> Compare "[History and Faith](#)", 1915, pp. 6-8.

presented in the New Testament was clearly an historical Person — that much is admitted by all who have really come to grips with the historical problems at all. Just as clearly, the Jesus presented in the New Testament was a supernatural Person. Yet, a supernatural person is never historical for modern liberalism. A problem arises then for those who adopt the liberal point of view. Their problem can only be solved by separating the natural from the supernatural in the New Testament account of Jesus. But the process of separation has never been successfully carried out. Many have tried. The modern liberal Church has put its very heart and soul into the effort. There is scarcely a more brilliant chapter in the history of the human spirit than this "quest for the historical Jesus" — but all attempts have failed. The trouble is that the miracles are found not to be an excrescence in the New Testament account of Jesus, but instead are found to belong to its very fabric. They are intimately connected with Jesus' lofty claims. They stand or fall with the undoubted purity of His character. They reveal the very nature of His mission in the world.

Yet miracles are rejected by the modern liberal Church, and with the miracles they reject the entirety of the supernatural Person of our Lord. It is not some miracles that are rejected, but all. It is not important that some of the wonderful works of Jesus are accepted by the liberal Church. It means absolutely nothing when some of the works of healing are regarded as historical. For those works are no longer regarded by modern liberalism as supernatural. They are merely extraordinary faith-cures. It is the presence or absence of the true supernatural that is the really important thing. Concessions as to faith-cures carry us a very short way at best. Those who disbelieve in the supernatural must simply reject the great mass of His wonderful works as legendary or mythical.

The question, then, does not concern the historicity of this miracle or that; it concerns the historicity of *all* miracles. That fact is often obscured. Obscuring it often introduces an element of disingenuousness into the advocacy of the liberal cause. The liberal preacher singles out some miracle and discusses it as though it were the only point at issue. The miracle usually singled out is the Virgin Birth. The liberal preacher insists on the possibility of believing in Christ no matter which view is adopted as to how He entered the world. The Person of Jesus is the same no matter how He was born. The impression made on the plain man is that the preacher accepts the main outlines of the New Testament account of Jesus. He merely has difficulties with this particular element in the account. But such an impression is radically false. It is true that some men deny the Virgin Birth, and yet accept the New Testament account of Jesus as a supernatural Person. But such men are exceedingly few and far between. It might be difficult to find a single one of any prominence living today, because the Virgin Birth it is so profoundly and obviously congruous with the whole New Testament presentation of Christ. The overwhelming majority of those who reject the Virgin Birth also reject the whole supernatural content of the New Testament. They make the meaning of the "resurrection" just what the word "resurrection" most emphatically does not mean — a permanent influence of Jesus, or a mere spiritual existence of Jesus beyond the grave. They may use old words here, but the thing they designate is gone. The disciples believed in the continued personal existence of Jesus even during the three sad days after the crucifixion. They were not Sadducees. They believed that Jesus lived and would rise at the last day. But what enabled them to begin the work of the Christian Church was that they believed the body of Jesus was already raised from the tomb by the power of God. That belief involves accepting the supernatural; and accepting the supernatural is thus the very heart and soul of the religion that we profess.

Whatever decision is made, the issue should certainly not be obscured. The issue does not concern individual miracles, even so important a miracle as the Virgin Birth. It really concerns all miracles. And the question concerning all miracles is simply the question of the acceptance or rejection of

the Savior that the New Testament presents. If you reject the miracles, then all you have in Jesus is the fairest flower of humanity. He made such an impression on His followers that, after His death, they could not believe that He had perished. They experienced hallucinations in which they thought they saw Him risen from the dead. But if you accept the miracles, then you have a Savior who came voluntarily into this world for our salvation. He suffered for our sins on the Cross, rose again from the dead by the power of God, and ever lives to make intercession for us. The difference between those two views is the difference between two totally diverse religions. It is high time to face this issue. It is high time men abandoned the misleading use of traditional phrases and spoke their full mind. Shall we accept the Jesus of the New Testament as our Savior, or shall we reject Him along with the liberal Church?

At this point an objection may be raised. The liberal preacher, it may be said, is often ready to speak of the "deity" of Christ. He is often ready to say that "Jesus is God." The plain man is very impressed by this. The preacher, he says, believes in the deity of our Lord. Obviously then his unorthodoxy must concern only details. Those who object to his presence in the Church are narrow and uncharitable heresy-hunters.

Unfortunately, our language has value only when it truthfully expresses our thoughts. The English word "God" has no particular virtue in itself. It is no more beautiful than other words. Its importance depends entirely on the meaning attached to it. Therefore, when the liberal preacher says that "Jesus is God," the significance of what he says depends entirely on what he means by "God."

It has already been observed that when the liberal preacher uses the word "God," he means something entirely different than what the Christian means by the same word. God, at least according to the logical trend of modern liberalism, is not a person who is separate from the world; God is merely the unity that pervades the world. To say, therefore, that Jesus is God merely means that the life of God, which appears in all men, appears with special clearness or richness in Jesus. Such an assertion is diametrically opposed to the Christian belief in the deity of Christ.

Equally opposed to Christian belief is another meaning that is sometimes attached to the assertion that Jesus is God. The word "God" is sometimes used to denote the supreme object of men's desires, the highest thing that men know. It is said that we have given up the notion of a Maker and Ruler of the universe. Such notions belong to "metaphysics." They are rejected by the modern man. But the word "God," though it can no longer denote the Maker of the universe, is still convenient to denote the object of men's emotions and desires. It can be said of some men that their God is mammon — mammon is what they labor for, and what their hearts are attached to. In a somewhat similar way, the liberal preacher says that Jesus is God. He does not mean that Jesus is identical in nature with a Maker and Ruler of the universe, because he no longer believes in such a Being. All he means is that the man Jesus is the highest thing we know. He was a man who was here in our midst, and had the same nature as ours. It is obvious that such a way of thinking is far more widely removed from Christian belief than Unitarianism, at least the earlier forms of Unitarianism. For the early Unitarians at least believed in God. The modern liberals, on the other hand, say that Jesus is God, not because they think highly of Jesus, but because they think desperately low of God.

There is another way in which liberalism within the "evangelical" churches is inferior to Unitarianism. It is in the matter of honesty. In order to maintain themselves in the evangelical churches, and to quiet the fears of their conservative associates, the liberals constantly resort to a

double use of language. Suppose that a young man has received disquieting reports of the unorthodoxy of a prominent preacher. While interrogating the preacher as to his belief, he receives a reassuring reply. "You may tell everyone," says the liberal preacher, "that I believe that Jesus is God." The young man goes away much impressed.

It may well be doubted whether the assertion, "I believe that Jesus is God," or the like, is strictly truthful. The liberal preacher attaches a real meaning to the words, and that meaning is very dear to his heart. He really does believe that "Jesus is God." The trouble is that he attaches a different meaning to his words than what the simple-minded person to whom he is speaking attaches to them. He offends the fundamental principle of truthfulness in language. According to that fundamental principle, language is truthful when the meaning intended to be produced in the mind of the person addressed is in accordance with the facts, not when the meaning is subjectively attached to the words by the speaker. Thus the truthfulness of the assertion, "I believe that Jesus is God," depends on the audience that is being addressed. If the audience is composed of theologically trained persons, who attach the same meaning to the word "God" as what the speaker attaches to it, then the language is truthful. But if the audience is composed of old-fashioned Christians, who have never attached anything but the old meaning to the word "God" (the meaning which appears in the first verse of Genesis), then the language is untruthful. And in the latter case, all the pious motives in the world will not make the utterance right. Christian ethics do not abrogate common honesty. No possible desire to edify the Church and avoid offense can excuse a lie.

At any rate, the deity of our Lord, in any real sense of the word "deity," is of course denied by modern liberalism. According to the modern liberal Church, Jesus differs from the rest of men only in degree, not in kind. He can only be divine if all men are divine. If the liberal conception of the deity of Christ is meaningless, what is the Christian conception? What does a Christian mean when he confesses that "Jesus is God"?

In the first place, it has already been observed that the New Testament represents Jesus as a supernatural Person. If Jesus is a supernatural Person, then He is either divine or He is an intermediate Being: higher than man, but lower than God. The latter view has been abandoned for many centuries in the Christian Church, and there is not much likelihood that it will be revived. Arianism is certainly dead. The thought of Christ as a super-angelic Being, like God but not God, evidently belongs to pagan mythology, not to the Bible or to Christian faith. If the theistic concept of the separateness between man and God is held, it will usually be admitted that Christ is either God or simply man. He is certainly not a Being intermediate between God and man. If He is not merely man, but a supernatural Person, then the conclusion must be that He is God.

In the second place, it has already been observed that in the New Testament, and in all true Christianity, Jesus is not merely an example for faith. He is the object of faith. And the faith of which Jesus is the object is clearly religious faith. The Christian man rests his confidence in Jesus in a way that would be out of place if he was not God. No less than the eternal welfare of the soul is committed to Jesus. The entire Christian attitude toward Jesus, as it is found throughout the New Testament, clearly presupposes the deity of our Lord.

The individual assertions of his deity ought to be approached in the light of this central presupposition. The individual passages which attest the deity of Christ are not excrescences in the New Testament. They are the natural fruits of a fundamental concept that is universal in Scripture. Those individual passages are not confined to any one book or group of books. In the Pauline Epistles, of course, the passages are particularly plain. The Christ of the Epistles appears

again and again as associated only with the Father and with His Spirit. One also does not have to seek very long in the Gospel of John; the deity of Christ is almost the theme of the book. But the testimony of the Synoptic Gospels is not really different from what appears everywhere else. For example, in the famous passage in Matt. 11:27 (Lk. 10:22): "All things have been delivered to me of my Father, and no man knows the Son but the Father, neither does any man know the Father save the Son and to whomever the Son will reveal Him." This way of presenting Jesus' relationship as Son to Father, absolutely fundamental in the Synoptic Gospels, involves the assertion of the deity of our Lord. The Person who speaks this way is represented as being in mysterious union with the eternal God.

Yet with equal clearness, the New Testament presents Jesus as a man. The Gospel of John contains at the beginning the stupendous utterance, "The Word was God." It dwells constantly upon the deity of the Lord. It also represents Jesus as weary at the well and as thirsty in the hour of agony on the Cross. One can scarcely discover in the Synoptic Gospels such drastic touches attesting the humanity of our Savior as those which appear again and again in the Gospel of John. Of course, there can be no debate with regard to the Synoptic Gospels. The Synoptists clearly present a Person who lived a genuine human life, and was Himself a true man.

The truth is, the witness of the New Testament is the same throughout. The New Testament presents One who was both God and man. It is interesting to observe how unsuccessful all the efforts have been to reject one part of this witness and retain the rest. The Apollinarians rejected the full humanity of the Lord, but in doing so they obtained a Person who was very different from the Jesus of the New Testament. The Jesus of the New Testament was clearly a man in the full sense. Others supposed that the divine and the human were so blended in Jesus that his nature was neither purely divine nor purely human, but a *tertium quid*, a third kind. Nothing could be more remote from the New Testament teaching than that. According to the New Testament, the divine and human natures were clearly distinct; the divine nature was pure divinity, and the human nature was pure humanity. Jesus was God and man in two distinct natures. The Nestorians, by contrast, so emphasized the distinctness of divine and human in Jesus as to suppose that there were two separate persons in Jesus. Such a Gnostic view is plainly contrary to the record. The New Testament plainly teaches the unity of the Person of our Lord.

By eliminating these errors, the Church arrived at the New Testament doctrine of two natures in one Person. The Jesus of the New Testament is "God and man, in two distinct natures, and one Person forever."<sup>38</sup> That doctrine is sometimes regarded as speculative. But nothing could be further from the fact. Whether the doctrine of the two natures is true or false, it was certainly produced not by speculation, but by an attempt to summarize, succinctly and exactly, the Scriptural teaching.

This doctrine is of course rejected by modern liberalism. And it is rejected in a very simple way — by the elimination of the whole higher nature of our Lord. Such radicalism is no more successful than the heresies of the past. The Jesus who is supposed to be left after the elimination of the supernatural element is at best a very shadowy figure. For eliminating the supernatural logically involves eliminating much of what remains. The historian constantly approaches an absurd view that would wipe Jesus from the pages of history altogether. Even after avoiding such dangers, after reconstructing a purely human Jesus by setting arbitrary limits to his own process of elimination, the Jesus whom the liberal historian constructs is found to be entirely unreal. He has a moral contradiction at the very center of His being — a contradiction due to His Messianic consciousness.

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<sup>38</sup> Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451

His Jesus was pure, humble, strong, and sane. And yet He supposed, without basis in fact, that He would be the final Judge of all the earth! This liberal Jesus remains a manufactured figure of the stage, despite all the efforts of modern psychological reconstruction to galvanize Him into life.

The Jesus of the New Testament and of the great Scriptural creeds is very different. That Jesus is indeed mysterious. Who can fathom the mystery of His Person? But the mystery is a mystery in which a man can rest. The Jesus of the New Testament has at least one advantage over the Jesus of modern reconstruction — He is real. He is not a manufactured figure suitable as a point of support for ethical maxims. Instead, he is a genuine Person whom a man can love. Men have loved Him through all the Christian centuries. And the strange thing is that despite all the efforts to remove Him from the pages of history, there are those who love Him still.

### Chapter 6: "Salvation"

It has been observed thus far that liberalism differs from Christianity with regard to the presuppositions of the gospel (the view of God and the view of man), with regard to the Book in which the gospel is contained, and with regard to the Person whose work the gospel presents. It is not surprising then that it differs from Christianity in its account of the gospel itself. It is not surprising that it presents an entirely different account of the way of salvation. In so far as it is willing to speak of "salvation" at all, Liberalism finds salvation in man; Christianity finds it in an act of God.

The difference concerns whether the basis of salvation is found in the redeeming work of Christ. According to Christian belief, Jesus is our Savior by virtue of what He did, not by virtue of what He said, or even what He was. He is our Savior, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins. He bore it on the cross in our stead. This is the Christian conception of the Cross of Christ. It is ridiculed as being a "subtle theory of the atonement." In reality, it is the plain teaching of the word of God. We know absolutely nothing about an atonement that is not a vicarious atonement. That is the only atonement of which the New Testament speaks. And this Bible doctrine is not intricate or subtle.

On the contrary, though it involves mysteries, it is so simple that a child can understand it. "We deserved eternal death, but the Lord Jesus, because He loved us, died instead of us on the cross" — surely there is nothing so very intricate about that. It is not the Bible doctrine of the atonement that is difficult to understand — what is really incomprehensible is the elaborate modern effort to get rid of the Bible doctrine in the interests of human pride.<sup>39</sup>

Modern liberal preachers do indeed speak of the "atonement" sometimes. But they speak of it just as seldom as they possibly can. One can see plainly that their hearts are not at the foot of the Cross. Indeed, at this point, as at many others, one has the feeling that traditional language is being strained to express totally alien ideas. When traditional phraseology is stripped away, the essence of the modern concept of the death of Christ is fairly plain, though it appears in many forms. Its essence is that the death of Christ did not have an effect on God, but only on man. Sometimes the effect on man is conceived of in a very simple way. Christ's death is provided merely as an example of self-sacrifice for us to emulate. Its uniqueness can be found only in the fact that Christian

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<sup>39</sup> See "The Second Declaration of the Council on Organic Union," *The Presbyterian*, for March 17, 1921, p. 8.

sentiment, gathering around it, has made it a convenient symbol for all self-sacrifice. It puts in concrete form what would otherwise have to be expressed in colder general terms.

Sometimes the effect of Christ's death upon us is conceived of in subtler ways. The death of Christ, it is said, shows how much God hates sin, because sin brought even the Holy One to the dreadful Cross. Therefore, we too ought to hate sin, as God hates it, and repent. Sometimes the death of Christ is thought of as exhibiting the love of God; His own Son was given up for us all. These modern "theories of the atonement" are not all on the same plane. The last one in particular, may be joined with a high view of Jesus' Person. But they err in ignoring the dreadful reality of guilt. They suggest that all we need for salvation is a mere persuasion of the human will. They all contain an element of truth: it is true that the death of Christ is an example of self-sacrifice which may inspire self-sacrifice in others; it is true that the death of Christ shows how much God hates sin; it is true that the death of Christ displays the love of God. All of these truths are plainly found in the New Testament. But they are swallowed up in a far greater truth — that Christ died instead of us to present us faultless before the throne of God. Without that central truth, all the rest is devoid of real meaning. It becomes an example of self-sacrifice that is useless to those who are under both the guilt and the bondage of sin. In itself, the knowledge of God's hatred of sin can bring only despair. An exhibition of the love of God is a mere display unless there was some underlying reason for the sacrifice. If the Cross is to be restored to its rightful place in Christian life, we shall have to penetrate far beneath the modern theories to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Modern liberals never weary of pouring out the vials of their hatred and scorn on the Christian doctrine of the Cross. Even at this point, the hope of avoiding offense is not always abandoned. They still sometimes use words like "vicarious atonement" — of course in a sense totally at variance from their Christian meaning. But despite such occasional employment of traditional language, liberal preachers reveal only too clearly what is in their minds. They speak with disgust of those who believe "that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner."<sup>40</sup> They use every weapon of caricature and vilification against the doctrine of the Cross. They pour out their scorn on a thing so holy and so precious that in its presence the Christian heart melts in gratitude too deep for words. It never seems to occur to modern liberals that in deriding the Christian doctrine of the Cross, they are trampling on human hearts. But their attacks may at least serve the purpose of showing what that doctrine is, and from this point of view they may be examined briefly now.

In the first place, the Christian way of salvation through the Cross of Christ is criticized because it is dependent on history. This criticism is sometimes evaded by saying that Christians ought to attend to what Christ does now for every Christian, rather than to what He did long ago in Palestine. But the evasion involves a total abandonment of the Christian faith. If the saving work of Christ were confined to what He does now for every Christian, there would be no such thing as a Christian gospel — an account of an event which put a new face on life. What we would have left would simply be mysticism, and mysticism is quite different from Christianity. It is the connection between the present experience of the believer, and the actual historic appearance of Jesus in the world, that prevents our religion from being mysticism, and causes it to be Christianity.

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<sup>40</sup> Fosdick, *Shall the Fundamentalists, Win?*, stenographically reported by Margaret Renton, 1922, p. 5.

It must certainly be admitted, then, that Christianity does depend on something that happened in history. Unless Jesus died as a propitiation for the sins of men at a definite point in history, our religion must be abandoned altogether. Christianity is most certainly dependent upon history.

But if that is so, then an objection lies very near. Must we really depend on what happened long ago for the welfare of our souls? Must we really wait until historians finish arguing over the value of sources and the like before we can have peace with God? Would it not be better to have a salvation which is with us here and now, and which depends only upon what we can see or feel?

With regard to this objection, it should be observed that if religion is made independent of history, there is no such thing as a gospel. For "gospel" means "good news," tidings, information about something that has happened. A gospel independent of history is a contradiction in terms. The Christian gospel does not mean a presentation of what has always been true, but a report of something new — something that imparts a totally different aspect to the situation of mankind. The situation of mankind was desperate because of sin. But God changed the situation by the atoning death of Christ. That is no mere reflection upon the old, but an account of something new. We are shut up in this world as if we were in a beleaguered camp. To maintain our courage, the liberal preacher offers us exhortation. "Make the best of the situation," he says, "look on the bright side of life." But unfortunately, such exhortation cannot change the facts. In particular, it cannot remove the dreadful fact of sin. The message of the Christian evangelist is very different. He does not offer reflection on the old, but tidings of the new, not exhortation but a gospel.<sup>41</sup>

It is true that the Christian gospel is not an account of something that happened yesterday, but of something that happened long ago. But the important thing is that it really happened. If it really happened, then it makes little difference *when* it happened. No matter when it happened, whether yesterday or in the first century, it remains a real gospel, a real piece of news.

The happening of long ago is confirmed by present experience. The Christian man first receives the account that the New Testament gives of the atoning death of Christ. That account is history. But if it is true, then it has effects in the present, and it can be tested by its effects. The Christian man tests the Christian message, and in testing he finds it is true. Experience does not provide a substitute for the documentary evidence, but it does confirm that evidence. To the Christian, the word of the Cross no longer seems a far-off thing, merely a matter to be disputed about by trained theologians. On the contrary, it is received into the Christian's inmost soul. Every day and hour of the Christian's life brings new confirmation of its truth.

In the second place, the Christian doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ is criticized on the ground that it is narrow. It binds salvation to the name of Jesus, and there are many men in the world who have never heard the name of Jesus in any effective way. What is really needed, we are told, is a salvation which will save all men everywhere, whether they have heard of Jesus or not, and in whatever type of life they have been reared. It is said that a new creed will not meet the universal need of the world. What is needed is some way to make whatever creed men may have effective in right living.

This second objection, as well as the first, is sometimes evaded. It is sometimes said that although accepting the gospel is one way of salvation, there may be other ways. But this method of meeting the objection relinquishes one of the things that are most obviously characteristic of the Christian

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<sup>41</sup> Compare "History and Faith," 1915, pp. 1-3.

message—its exclusiveness. What struck the early observers of Christianity most forcibly was not only that salvation was offered by means of the Christian gospel, but that all other means were resolutely rejected. The early Christian missionaries demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion to Christ. Such exclusiveness ran counter to the prevailing syncretism of the Hellenistic age. In that day, many saviors were offered by many religions, and the various pagan religions could live together in perfect harmony. When a man became a devotee of one god, he did not have to give up the others. But Christianity would have nothing to do with these "courtly polygamies of the soul."<sup>42</sup> It demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion. It insisted that all other Saviors must be deserted for the one Lord. In other words, salvation was not *merely* through Christ; it was *only* through Christ. In that little word "only" lay all the offense. Without that word there would have been no persecutions. The cultured men of the day would probably have been willing to give Jesus an honorable place among the other saviors of mankind. Without its exclusiveness, the Christian message would have seemed perfectly inoffensive to them. In the same way, placing Jesus alongside other benefactors of mankind makes modern liberalism perfectly inoffensive. All men speak well of it. But it is entirely futile. The offense of the Cross is done away with, but so is the glory and power of it.

Thus it must fairly be admitted that Christianity does bind salvation to the name of Christ. The question does not need be discussed here whether the benefits of Christ's death are ever applied to those who have not heard or accepted the gospel message, even though they have reached the age of discretion. Certainly the New Testament holds out no clear hope with regard to this matter. At the very basis of the work of the apostolic Church is the consciousness of a terrible responsibility. The sole message of life and salvation had been committed to men. That message is to be proclaimed while there is yet time and at all cost. The objection to the exclusiveness of the Christian way of salvation, therefore, cannot be evaded. It must be met.

In answer to the objection, it may be said simply that the Christian way of salvation is narrow only so long as the Church chooses to let it remain narrow. The name of Jesus is strangely adaptable to men of every race and every kind of previous education. And the Church has ample means, with the promise of God's Spirit, to bring the name of Jesus to all. If, therefore, this way of salvation is not offered to all, it is not the fault of the way of salvation itself, but the fault of those who fail to use the means that God has placed in their hands.

It may be said that it is too much to place such a stupendous responsibility in the hands of weak and sinful men. Would it not be more natural for God to offer salvation to all without requiring them to accept a new message, and thus be dependent on the faithfulness of the messengers? The answer to this objection is plain. It is certainly true that the Christian way of salvation places a stupendous responsibility on men. But that is the kind of responsibility that God does commit to men, as ordinary observation shows. It is like the responsibility of the parent for the child. The parent has full power to mar the body and soul of the child. The responsibility is terrible, but it is a responsibility that unquestionably exists. The responsibility of the Church to make the name of Jesus known to all mankind is similar. It is a terrible responsibility, but it exists. It is just like God's other known dealings.

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<sup>42</sup> Phillimore, in the introduction to his translation of Philostratus, *In Honour of Apollonius of Tyana*, 1912, vol. i, p. iii.

But modern liberalism has still more specific objections to the Christian doctrine of the Cross. How can one person, it is asked, suffer for the sins of another? We are told the thing is absurd. Guilt, they say, is personal. If I allow another man to suffer for my fault, my guilt is not diminished one whit thereby.

An answer to this objection is sometimes found in the instances of ordinary human life where one person does suffer for another person's sin. In the war, for example, many men died freely for the welfare of others. Here, it is said, we have something analogous to the sacrifice of Christ.

It must be confessed, however, that the analogy is very faint; it does not touch the specific point at issue. The death of a volunteer soldier in the war was like the death of Christ in being a supreme example of self-sacrifice. But the thing accomplished by the self-sacrifice was entirely different from what was accomplished on Calvary. The death of those who sacrificed themselves in the war brought peace and protection to their loved ones at home, but it could never avail to wipe out the guilt of sin.

The real answer to the objection is not to be found in the similarity between Christ's death and other examples of self-sacrifice, but in the profound difference.<sup>43</sup> Why are men no longer willing to trust their own salvation, and the hope of the world, to one act done by one Man long ago? Why do they prefer to trust millions of acts of self-sacrifice wrought by millions of men all through the centuries, and in our own day? The answer is plain. It is because men have lost sight of the majesty of Jesus' Person. They think of Him as a man like themselves. And if He was a man like themselves, then His death becomes simply an example of self-sacrifice. But there have been millions of examples of self-sacrifice. Why then should we pay such exclusive attention to this one Palestinian example from long ago? Referring to Jesus, men used to say, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin." They no longer say that. On the contrary, every man is now regarded as plenty good enough to pay the price of sin, if he will only go bravely over the top in some noble cause, whether in peace or in war.

It is perfectly true that no mere man can pay the penalty of another man's sin. But it does not follow that Jesus could not do it. Jesus was no mere man. He was and is the eternal Son of God. Jesus is master of the innermost secrets of the moral world. He has done what no other could possibly do. He has borne our sin.

The Christian doctrine of the atonement, therefore, is altogether rooted in the Christian doctrine of the deity of Christ. The reality of an atonement for sin depends on the New Testament presentation of the Person of Christ. Even the hymns dealing with the Cross that we sing in Church can be placed in an ascending scale according to how highly they view Jesus' Person. At the very bottom of the scale is that familiar hymn:

*Nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer to thee!  
E'en though it be a cross  
That raiseth me.*

That is a perfectly good hymn. It means that our trials may be a discipline to bring us nearer to God. The thought is not opposed to Christianity; it is found in the New Testament. But many persons have the impression that there is something specifically Christian about it because the

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<sup>43</sup> For what follows, compare "The Church in the War," in *The Presbyterian*, for May 29 1919, pp. 10f.

word "cross" is found in the hymn, and that it has something to do with the gospel. This impression is entirely false. In reality, the cross that is spoken of is not the Cross of Christ, but our own cross. The verse simply means that our own crosses or trials may be a means to bring us nearer to God. It is a perfectly good thought, but certainly it is not the gospel. One can only be sorry that the people on the Titanic could not find a better hymn to use in the last solemn hour of their lives. But there is another hymn in the hymn-book:

*In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.*

That is certainly better. It is not our own crosses that is spoken of here, but the Cross of Christ, the actual event that took place on Calvary. And that event is celebrated as the center of all history. Certainly the Christian man can sing that hymn. But even there, one misses the full Christian sense of the meaning of the Cross. The Cross is celebrated, but it is not understood.

It is well, therefore, that there is another hymn in our hymn-book:

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

Here at length are heard the accents of true Christian feeling — "the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died." When we come to see that it was no mere man who suffered on Calvary, but the Lord of Glory, then we are willing to say that one drop of the precious blood of Jesus is of more value, for our own salvation and for the hope of society, than all the rivers of blood that have flowed upon the battlefields of history.

Thus the objection to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ disappears altogether before the tremendous Christian sense of the majesty of Jesus' Person. The Christ of modern naturalistic reconstruction could never have suffered for the sins of others, but that is not true of the Lord of Glory. If the notion of vicarious atonement is so absurd, as modern opposition would lead us to believe, then what can be said of the Christian experience that is based on it? The modern liberal Church is fond of appealing to experience. Where will true Christian experience be found if not in the blessed peace that comes from Calvary? That peace comes only when a man recognizes that all his striving to be right with God, and all his feverish endeavors to keep the Law, are not necessary to be saved. The Lord Jesus has wiped out the handwriting against him by dying instead of him on the Cross. Who can measure the depth of the peace and joy that comes from this blessed knowledge? Is it a "theory of the atonement," a delusion of man's fancy? Or is it the very truth of God?

Still another objection remains against the Christian doctrine of the Cross. The objection concerns the character of God. The modern liberal exclaims that we have a degraded view of God when we portray Him as "alienated" from man, and as waiting coldly until a price is paid before He will grant salvation! We are told that, in reality, God is more willing to forgive sin than we are willing to be forgiven. Reconciliation, therefore, concerns only man. It all depends on us. God will receive us any time we choose.

The objection depends of course upon the liberal view of sin. If sin is the trifling matter that the liberal Church supposes it is, then indeed the curse of God's law can be taken very lightly. God can easily let bygones be bygones.

Letting bygones be bygones has a pleasant sound. In reality, it is heartless. It will not do at all, even in the case of sins committed against our fellow-men, to say nothing of sin against God. What will be done about the harm we have done to our neighbor? Sometimes the harm can be repaired. If we have defrauded our neighbor of a sum of money, we can pay the sum back with interest. But in the case of the more serious wrongs, such repayment is usually impossible. The more serious wrongs are those that are done to men's souls, not their bodies. Who can be complacent about the wrongs he has committed of that kind? Who can bear to think, for example, of the harm that he has done to those younger than himself by being a bad example? And what of those sad words spoken to those we love, which left scars that the hand of time can never obliterate? In the presence of such memories, we are told by the modern preacher to simply repent, and let bygones be bygones. What a heartless thing such repentance would be! We escape into some higher, happier, respectable life. But what of those we helped to drag down to the brink of hell by our example and our words? We forget them, and we let bygones be bygones!

Such repentance will never wipe out the guilt of sin — not even sin committed against our fellow-men, to say nothing of sin against our God. The truly penitent man longs to wipe out the effects of his sin, and not merely to forget it. But who can wipe out the effects of sin? Others are suffering because of our past sins. We can attain no real peace until we suffer in their stead. We long to go back into the tangle of our life, and make right the things that are wrong — at least to suffer where we have caused others to suffer. Christ did something like that for us when He died instead of us on the cross. He atoned for all our sins.

The sorrow for sins committed against one's fellow men does indeed remain in the Christian's heart. He will seek by every means within his power to repair the damage he has done. But atonement at least has been made —made as truly as if the sinner himself had suffered with and for those he wronged. And the sinner himself, by a mystery of grace, becomes right with God. All sin at bottom is a sin against God. "Against you, you only have I sinned" is the cry of a true penitent.<sup>44</sup> How terrible is the sin against God! Who can recall the wasted moments and years? They are gone, never to return. Gone is the little allotted span of life. Gone is the short day in which a man must work. Who can measure the irrevocable guilt of a wasted life? Yet God has provided a fountain of cleansing, even for such guilt, in the precious blood of Christ. God has clothed us with Christ's righteousness as with a garment. In Christ, we stand spotless before the judgment throne.

Thus, denying the necessity of atonement denies the existence of a real moral order. It is strange how those who make such a denial can regard themselves as disciples of Jesus. If one thing is clear in the record of Jesus' life, it is that he recognized the justice of God as distinguished from the love of God. God is love, according to Jesus, but He is not only love. Jesus spoke, in terrible words, of the sin that shall never be forgiven either in this world or in the one to come.<sup>45</sup> Clearly Jesus recognized the existence of retributive justice. He was far from accepting the modern view of sin as light.

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<sup>44</sup> David's cry in Ps. 51:4.

<sup>45</sup> Matt. 12:32.

But what, then, becomes of God's love? Even if it is admitted that justice demands punishment for sin, the modern liberal theologian will ask what becomes of the Christian doctrine that justice is swallowed up by grace? If God is represented as waiting for a price to be paid before sin is forgiven, His justice may be rescued, but what becomes of His love?

Modern liberal teachers never tire of this objection. They speak with horror of the doctrine of an "alienated" or "angry" God. Of course it would be easy to point to the New Testament which clearly speaks of the wrath of God, and the wrath of Jesus Himself. All of Jesus' teaching presupposes a divine indignation against sin. What possible right do they have to regard themselves as true disciples of Jesus if they reject this vital element of his teaching and example? The truth is that the modern rejection of the doctrine of God's wrath proceeds from a light view of sin. This is totally at variance with the teaching of the whole New Testament, and of Jesus Himself. Once a man has a true conviction of his sin, he has little difficulty with the doctrine of the Cross.

The modern objection to the doctrine of the atonement as contrary to the love of God, is based upon the most abysmal misunderstanding of the doctrine itself. Modern liberal teachers persist in speaking of the sacrifice of Christ as though it were a sacrifice made by someone other than God. They speak of it as though it meant that God waits coldly until a price is paid to Him before He forgives sin. As a matter of fact, it means nothing of the kind. The objection ignores what is absolutely fundamental in the Christian doctrine of the Cross: God Himself, and not someone else, made the sacrifice for sin — God Himself, in the person of the Son, assumed our nature and died for us; God Himself, in the Person of the Father, did not spare His own Son but offered Him up for us all. Salvation is as free for us as the air we breathe. The dreadful cost is God's. The gain is ours. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."<sup>46</sup> Such love is very different from the complacency found in the God of modern preaching. This love is love that did not count the cost. It is love that is love indeed.

This love and this love alone brings true joy to men. The modern liberal Church does indeed seek Joy. But it seeks it in ways that are false. How may communion with God be made joyful? Obviously, we are told, by emphasizing the comforting attributes of God — His long-suffering, His love. They urge us to regard Him not as a moody Despot, not as a sternly righteous Judge, but simply as a loving Father. Away with the horrors of the old theology! Let us worship a God in whom we can rejoice.

Two questions arise with regard to this method of making religion joyful. In the first place, does it work? In the second place, is it true?

Does it work? It certainly ought to work. How can anyone be unhappy when the ruler of the universe is declared to be the loving Father of all men, who will never permanently inflict pain upon His children? If all sin will necessarily be forgiven, where is the sting of remorse? Yet men are strangely ungrateful. After the modern preacher has diligently done his part, after he has carefully eliminated everything unpleasant from the concept of God, and after he has celebrated God's unlimited love with the eloquence it deserves, the congregation somehow persistently refuses to burst into the old ecstasies of joy. The truth is, the God of modern preaching, though perhaps very good, is rather uninteresting. Nothing is so insipid as indiscriminate good humor. Does real love cost so little? If God will necessarily forgive us, no matter what we do, why trouble

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<sup>46</sup> John 3:16

ourselves about Him at all? Such a God may deliver us from the fear of hell, but His heaven, if He has any, is full of sin.

The other objection to the modern encouraging idea of God is that it is not true. How do you know that God is all love and kindness? Surely such knowledge does not come through nature, for nature is full of horrors. Human suffering may be unpleasant, but it is real, and God must have something to do with it. Surely such knowledge does not come through the Bible. For it was from the Bible that the old theologians derived the concept of God which you reject as gloomy. The Bible says, "The Lord your God is a consuming fire."<sup>47</sup> Or is Jesus alone your authority? You are no better off. For it was Jesus who spoke of the outer darkness and the everlasting fire, of the sin that shall not be forgiven either in this age or in that which is to come.<sup>48</sup> Or do you appeal, for your comforting idea of God, to a twentieth-century revelation that was granted to you immediately by God? I fear you will convince no one but yourself.

Religion cannot be made joyful simply by looking on the bright side of God. A one-sided God is not a real God, and it is the real God alone who can satisfy the longing of our soul. God is love, but is He only love? God is love, but is love God? If you seek only joy, and you seek joy at any cost, you will not find it. How then may joy be attained?

The search for joy in religion seems to have ended in disaster. God is found to be enveloped in impenetrable mystery, and in awful righteousness. Man is confined in the prison of the world, trying to make the best of his condition, beautifying the prison with tinsel, yet secretly dissatisfied with his bondage. He is dissatisfied with a merely relative goodness which is no goodness at all. He is dissatisfied with the companionship of his sinful fellows. He is unable to forget his heavenly destiny and his heavenly duty. He finds himself longing for communion with the Holy One. There seems to be no hope. God is separate from sinners. There is no room for joy, only a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation.

Yet such a God has an advantage over the comforting God of modern preaching. He is alive. He is sovereign. He is not bound by His creation or by His creatures. He can perform wonders. Could He save us if He wanted to? He *has* saved us — the gospel consists in that very message. Such salvation could not have been foretold; still less could the manner of it have been foretold. That Birth, that Life, that Death — why was it done just this way, why then, and why there? It all seems so very local, so very particular, so very unphilosophical, so very unlike what might have been expected. Men say, "Are not our own methods of salvation better than that?" "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"<sup>49</sup> Yet what if it were true? "So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too"<sup>50</sup> God's own Son was delivered up for us all. Freedom from the world, sought by philosophers of all the ages, is now offered freely to every simple soul. Things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes. The long striving is over, the impossible is accomplished, and sin is conquered by this mysterious grace. Communion at length is now possible with the holy God, our Father which art in heaven!

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<sup>47</sup> Deut. 4:24.

<sup>48</sup> Matt. 8:12; 25:41; 12:32.

<sup>49</sup> 2 Kings 5:12.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Browning, "An Epistle of Karshish, the Arab Physician", 1855.

Surely this and this alone is joy. But it is a joy that is akin to fear. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.<sup>51</sup> We were safer with a God of our own devising — a God of love and only love, a Father and nothing else, one we could stand before in our own merit without fear. If you will, you may be satisfied with such a God. But we, God help us — sinful as we are — we would see Jehovah. We would venture into the very presence of God, despairing, hoping, trembling, half-doubting and half-believing, trusting all to Jesus. And in His presence, we live.

The atoning death of Christ, and that alone, presents sinners as righteous in God's sight. The Lord Jesus has paid the full penalty for their sins, and clothed them with His perfect righteousness before the judgment seat of God. But Christ has done far more than that for Christians. He has given them not only a new and right relation to God, but a new life in God's presence forevermore. He has saved them from the power as well as the guilt of sin. The New Testament does not end with the death of Christ. It does not end with the triumphant words of Jesus on the Cross, "It is finished."<sup>52</sup> The death was followed by the resurrection; and the resurrection, like the death, was for our sakes. Jesus rose from the dead into a new life of glory and power. And into that life He brings those for whom He died. The Christian has not only died to sin, but he also lives to God on the basis of Christ's redeeming work.

Thus was completed the redeeming work of Christ — the work for which He entered into the world. The account of that work is the "gospel," the "good news." It could never have been predicted, for sin deserves nothing but eternal death. But God triumphed over sin through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How is the redeeming work of Christ applied to the individual Christian man? The answer of the New Testament is plain. According to the New Testament, the work of Christ is applied to the individual Christian man by the Holy Spirit. This work of the Holy Spirit is part of the creative work of God. It is not accomplished by ordinary means. It is not accomplished merely by using the good that is already in man. On the contrary, it is something new. It is not an influence upon the life, but the beginning of a new life. It is not developing what we already had, but a new birth. At the very center of Christianity are the words, "You must be born again."<sup>53</sup>

These words are despised today. They involve supernaturalism. The modern man is as opposed to supernaturalism in the experience of the individual as in the realm of history. A cardinal doctrine of modern liberalism is that the world's evil may be overcome by the world's good. No help is thought to be needed from outside the world.

This doctrine is propagated in various ways. It runs all through the popular literature of our time. It dominates religious literature. It appears even on the stage. Some years ago a play that taught the doctrine in powerful fashion gained great popularity. The play began with a scene in a London boarding-house. It was a very discouraging scene. The people in that boarding-house were not desperate criminals by any means, but one almost wished they had been — they would have been more interesting. As it was, they were simply sordid, selfish people, snapping and snarling about things to eat and about creature comforts. One is tempted to say that they were the sort of people who have no souls. The scene was a powerful picture of the hideousness of the commonplace. But presently, a mysterious stranger from "the third floor back" enters the scene, and everything

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<sup>51</sup> Heb.10:31.

<sup>52</sup> John 19:30.

<sup>53</sup> John 3:7.

changes. He had no creed to offer, and no religion. He simply engaged in conversation with everyone in that boardinghouse, discovering the one good point in every individual life, some one true human affection, some one noble ambition. It was long hidden by a thick coating of sordidness and selfishness. Its very existence had been forgotten, but it was there. And when it was brought to light, their whole life was transformed. Thus the evil in man was overcome by the good that was already there.<sup>54</sup>

The same thing is taught in more immediately practical ways. For example, there are those who apply it to the prisoners in our jails. The inmates of jails and penitentiaries no doubt constitute unpromising material. But it is a great mistake, it is said, to tell them that they are bad, or to discourage them by insisting on their sin. On the contrary, we are told, what ought to be done is to find the good that is already in them and build on that. We ought to appeal to some latent sense of honor showing that even criminals possess the remnants of our common human nature. Thus again, the evil that is in man is to be overcome by a good which he possesses in himself, not by a foreign good.

Certainly there is a large element of truth in this modern principle. That element of truth is found in the Bible. The Bible certainly teaches that the good that is already in man ought to be fostered in order to check the evil. Whatever things are true and pure and of good report — we ought to think on those things.<sup>55</sup> Certainly the principle of overcoming the world's evil by the good already in the world is a great principle. The old theologians recognized it to the full in their doctrine of "common grace." There is something in the world, even apart from Christianity, that restrains the worst manifestations of evil. And that something ought to be used. Without it, this world could not be lived in for a day. It will palliate the symptoms of the disease. It will change the form of the disease.

But there is one thing it will not accomplish. It will not *remove* the disease of sin. Sometimes the disease is hidden, and we may think it is cured. But then it bursts forth in some new way, as in 1914, and it startles the world. What is really needed is not a salve to palliate the symptoms of sin, but a remedy that attacks the root of the disease.

In reality, however, the analogy of disease is misleading. The only true analogy — if it can be called that — is the one used in the Bible. Man is not merely ill. He is *dead* in trespasses and sins. What is really needed is a new life. That life is given by the Holy Spirit in "regeneration" or the new birth.

There are many passages and many ways in which the central doctrine of the new birth is taught in the Word of God. One of the most stupendous passages is Galatians. 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me." Bengel called that passage the marrow of Christianity. And rightly so. It refers to the objective basis of Christianity that is found in the redeeming work of Christ, and it also contains the supernaturalism of Christian experience. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" — these are extraordinary words. "If you look at Christians," Paul says in effect, "you see so many manifestations of the life of Christ." Undoubtedly if the words of Gal. 2:20 stood alone, they might be taken in a mystical or pantheistic sense. They might be taken to mean that the personality of the Christian is merged into the personality of Christ. But Paul had no reason to fear such a misinterpretation; he guarded against

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<sup>54</sup> "Passing Of The Third Floor Back", by Jerome K. Jerome, 1909.

<sup>55</sup> Phil. 4:8.

it by the whole of his teaching. The new relation of the Christian to Christ, according to Paul, involves no loss of the Christian's separate personality. On the contrary, it is intensely personal. It is not merely a mystical relationship to the All or the Absolute, but a relationship of love existing between one person and another. Just because Paul guarded against misunderstanding, he was not afraid to use extremely bold language. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" — these words involve a tremendous conception of the break that comes in a man's life when he becomes a Christian. The change is so stupendous, it is almost as though he became a new person. These words were not written by a man who believed that Christianity merely means a new motive has entered into his life. Paul believed with all his mind and heart in the doctrine of the new creation or the new birth.

That doctrine represents one aspect of the salvation which was wrought by Christ and applied by His Spirit. But there is another aspect of the same salvation. Regeneration means a new life, but it also means a new relation to God. That new relation is instituted by "justification" — the act of God by which a sinner is pronounced righteous in His sight because of the atoning death of Christ. It is not necessary to ask whether justification comes before regeneration or vice versa; in reality they are two aspects of one salvation. And they both stand at the very beginning of the Christian life. The Christian does not merely have the *promise* of a new life, but he already *has* a new life. And he does not merely have the *promise* of being pronounced righteous in God's sight, but he is already pronounced righteous here and now (though the blessed pronouncement will be confirmed on the judgment day). At the beginning of every Christian life there stands a definite act of God, not just a process.

That does not mean that every Christian can tell exactly at what moment he was justified and born again. Some Christians are really able to give the day and hour of their conversion. It is a grievous sin to ridicule the experience of such men. Sometimes they are inclined to ignore the steps in the providence of God that prepared them for the great change. But they are correct on the main point. They know that when they knelt in prayer, they were still in their sins; and when they rose from their knees, they were children of God, never to be separated from Him. Such an experience is a very holy thing. On the other hand, it is a mistake to demand that it be a universal experience. There are Christians who can give the day and hour of their conversion, but the great majority do not know exactly when they were saved. The effects of the act are plain, but the act itself was done in the quietness of God. Very often this is the experience of children brought up by Christian parents. It is not necessary for everyone to pass through agonies of soul before being saved. There are those to whom faith comes peacefully and easily through the nurture of Christian homes.

However it is manifested, the beginning of the Christian life is an act of God. It is an act of God and not an act of man.

That does not mean, however, that in the beginning of the Christian life God deals with us as if we were sticks or stones, unable to understand what is being done. On the contrary, He deals with us as people. Salvation has a place in the conscious life of man. God uses a conscious act of the human soul in our salvation. Even though it is the work of God's Spirit, it is at the same time an act of man. That act of man which God produces and employs in salvation is *faith*. At the center of Christianity is the doctrine of "justification by faith."

In exalting faith, we are not immediately putting ourselves in contradiction to modern thought. Faith is highly exalted by men of the most modern type. But what kind of faith? That is where the difference of opinion emerges.

Faith is being exalted so high today that men are satisfied with any kind of faith, just so it is faith. We are told that it makes no difference what is believed, just so the blessed attitude of faith is there. Undogmatic faith, it is said, is better than dogmatic, because it is purer faith — faith less weakened by the alloy of knowledge.

It is perfectly clear that employing faith merely as a beneficent state of the soul brings some results. Faith in the most absurd things sometimes produces the most beneficent and far-reaching results. But the disturbing thing is that all faith has an object. The scientific observer may not think that it is the object doing the work. From his vantage point, he may see that it is faith considered simply as a psychological phenomenon that is the important thing. Any other object would have done as well. But the one who does the believing is always convinced that it is not the faith, but the object of the faith, that is helping him. The moment he becomes convinced that it is merely the faith that is helping him, the faith disappears. Faith always involves a conviction of the objective truth or trustworthiness of the object. If the object is not really trustworthy, then the faith is a false faith. It is perfectly true that false faith often helps a man. Things that are false will accomplish a great many useful things in the world. If I take a counterfeit coin and intend to buy dinner with it, the dinner will be every bit as good as if the coin were a product of the mint. And what a very useful thing that dinner will be! But just as I am on my way downtown to buy dinner for a poor man, an expert tells me that my coin is counterfeit. That miserable, heartless theorizer! While he is going into uninteresting, learned details about the primitive history of that coin, a poor man is dying for want of bread. So it is with faith.

Faith is so useful, we are told, that we must not scrutinize its basis in truth. The trouble is, avoiding scrutiny will itself involve the destruction of faith. For faith is essentially dogmatic. Despite all you do, you cannot remove the element of intellectual assent from faith. Faith is the opinion that someone will do something for you. If that person will really do that thing for you, then your faith is true. If he will not do it, then your faith is false. In the latter case, all the benefits in the world will not make the faith true. Though it has transformed the world from darkness to light, though it has produced thousands of glorious healthy lives, it remains a pathological phenomenon. It is false, and sooner or later it is sure to be found out.<sup>56</sup>

Such counterfeits should be removed, not for the love of destruction, but to leave room for pure gold. The existence of true objects is implied by the presence of counterfeits. Faith is often based on error, but there would be no faith at all unless it were sometimes based on truth. If Christian faith is based on truth, then it is not faith that saves the Christian, but the object of the faith. And the object of the faith is Christ. Faith, according to the Christian view, simply means receiving a gift. To have faith in Christ means to cease trying to win God's favor by one's own character. The man who believes in Christ simply accepts the sacrifice which Christ offered on Calvary. The result of such faith is a new life and all good works. But the salvation itself is an absolutely free gift of God.

The concept of faith that prevails in the liberal Church is very different. According to modern liberalism, faith is essentially the same as "making Christ Master" in one's life. At least men's welfare is sought by making Christ Master in their life. That simply means that salvation is thought to be obtained by our own obedience to the commands of Christ. Such teaching is a sublimated

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<sup>56</sup> Numbers 32:23

form of legalism. In this view, the ground of hope is not the sacrifice of Christ, but our own obedience to God's law.

In this way, the whole achievement of the Reformation has been surrendered, and we have returned to the religion of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, God raised up a man who began to read the Epistle to the Galatians with his own eyes. The result was the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith. Our entire evangelical freedom has been based on that rediscovery. As expounded by Luther and Calvin, the Epistle to the Galatians became the "Magna Charta of Christian liberty." But modern liberalism has returned to the old interpretation of Galatians, which was urged against the Reformers. Thus, Professor Burton's elaborate commentary on the Epistle is in one respect a medieval book, despite all its extremely valuable modern scholarship. It has returned to an anti-Reformation exegesis, by which Paul is thought to be attacking only the piecemeal morality of the Pharisees. In reality, of course, the object of Paul's attack is the thought that man can earn his acceptance with God in any way at all. What Paul is primarily interested in is not spiritual religion versus ceremonial law, but the free grace of God versus human merit.

The grace of God is rejected by modern liberalism. And the result is slavery — the slavery of the law, the wretched bondage by which man undertakes the impossible task of establishing his own righteousness as a ground of acceptance with God. It may seem strange at first sight that "liberalism," the very name which means freedom, should in reality be wretched slavery. But the phenomenon is not really so strange. Emancipation from the blessed will of God always involves bondage to some worse taskmaster.

Thus it may be said of the modern liberal Church, as of the Jerusalem of Paul's day, that "she is in bondage with her children."<sup>57</sup> God grant that she may turn again to the liberty of the gospel of Christ!

The liberty of the gospel depends upon the gift of God by which the Christian life is begun — a gift which involves justification. Justification is the removal of the guilt of sin, the establishment of a right relation between the believer and God, and the regeneration or new birth that makes a new creature of the Christian man.

But there is one obvious objection to this high doctrine of the new creation, and it provides a fuller account of the Christian way of salvation. The obvious objection is that it does not seem to be in accord with the observed facts. Are Christians really new creatures? It certainly does not seem so. They are subject to the same old conditions of life which they were subject to before. If you look at them, you cannot notice any very obvious change. They have the same weaknesses, and unfortunately, they sometimes have the same sins. The new creation, if it is really new, does not seem to be very perfect. God can hardly look at it and say, as he did with the first creation, that it is all very good.

This is a very real objection. But Paul meets it gloriously in the very same verse in which the doctrine is so boldly proclaimed. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" — that is the doctrine of the new creation. But immediately the objection is addressed" "The life which I now live in the flesh," Paul continues, "I live by the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." *The life which I now live in the flesh* — there is the admission. Paul admits that the Christian does live a life in the flesh, subject to the same old earthly conditions, with the

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<sup>57</sup> Gal. 4:25.

same ongoing battle against sin. "But," says Paul (and here the objection is answered), "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." The Christian life is lived by faith and not by sight. The great change has not yet come to full fruition. Sin has not yet been fully conquered. The beginning of the Christian life is a new *birth*, not an immediate creation of the full grown man. Although the new life has not yet come to full fruition, the Christian knows that the fruition will not fail. He is confident that the God who has begun a good work in him will complete it to the day of Christ.<sup>58</sup> He knows that the Christ who has loved him and given Himself for him will not fail him now. Through the Holy Spirit he will build him up to the perfect man. That is what Paul means by living the Christian life by faith.

Thus the Christian life, though it begins by a momentary *act* of God, it continues by a *process*. In other words — to use theological language — justification and regeneration are followed by sanctification. In principle the Christian is already free from the present evil world, but in practice freedom must still be attained. Thus the Christian life is not a life of idleness, but a battle.

That is what Paul means when he speaks of faith working through love (Gal. 5:6). The faith that is the means of salvation is not an idle faith, like the faith condemned in the Epistle of James, but a faith that works. The work that it performs is love, and Paul explains what love is in the last section of the Epistle to the Galatians. Love, in the Christian sense, is not a mere emotion. It is a very practical and a very comprehensive thing. It involves nothing less than keeping the whole law of God. "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>59</sup> Yet the practical results of faith do not mean that faith itself is a work. It is a significant thing that in the last "practical" section of Galatians, Paul does not say that faith produces the life of love. He says that the Spirit of God produces it.<sup>60</sup> In the pregnant words, "faith working through love," the Spirit is represented as doing exactly what is attributed to faith. The apparent contradiction simply leads to the true conception of faith. True faith does not *do* anything. When it is said to do something (for example, when we say that it can remove mountains), that is only a very natural shorthand. Faith is the exact opposite of works. Faith does not give, it receives. So when Paul says that we do something by faith, it is just another way of saying that we do nothing of ourselves. When it is said that faith works through love, it means that through faith the necessary basis of all Christian work has been obtained. This basis consists in the removal of guilt and the birth of the new man. It means that the Spirit of God has been received — the Spirit who works with and through the Christian man for holy living. The force that enters the Christian life through faith, and works itself out through love, is the power of the Spirit of God.

But the Christian life is lived not only by faith; it is also lived in hope. The Christian is in the midst of a sore battle. Nothing but the coldest heartlessness could be satisfied with the condition of the world at large. It is certainly true that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.<sup>61</sup> Even in the Christian life there are things that we would like to see removed. There are fears within as well as fights without, and within the Christian life there are sad evidences of sin. But according to the hope which Christ has given us, there will be final victory. The struggle of this world will be followed by the glories of heaven. This hope runs all through the Christian life.

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<sup>58</sup> Phil. 1:6.

<sup>59</sup> Gal. 5:14.

<sup>60</sup> Gal. 5:22.

<sup>61</sup> Rom. 8:22.

Christianity is not engrossed by this transitory world. It measures all things by the thought of eternity.

At this point, an objection is frequently raised. The "otherworldliness" of Christianity is objected to as a form of selfishness. The Christian, it is said, does what is right because of the hope of heaven. A man who, because of duty, walks boldly into the darkness of annihilation would be much nobler!

This objection would have some weight if Christian belief taught that heaven was mere enjoyment. But as a matter of fact, heaven is communion with God and with His Christ. It can be said reverently that the Christian longs for heaven not only for his own sake, but also for the sake of God. Our present love is so cold and our present service is so weak that we want one day to love and serve Him as His love deserves. It is perfectly true that the Christian is dissatisfied with the present world, but it is holy dissatisfaction. It is the hunger and thirst after righteousness that our Savior blessed.<sup>62</sup> We are now separated from the Savior by the veil of sense and the effects of sin. It is not selfish to long to see Him face to face. To relinquish such longing would not be unselfishness. Instead, it would be like the cold heartlessness of a man who could part from his father, mother, wife, or child without a pang. It is not selfish to long for the One whom we love, not having seen Him.<sup>63</sup>

Such is the Christian life — it is a life of conflict but it is also a life of hope. It views this world from the vantage point of eternity; the fashion of this world passes away, and all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>64</sup>

The "program" of the modern liberal Church is very different. In that program, heaven has little place and this world is really all in all. The rejection of the Christian hope is not always definite or conscious. Sometimes the liberal preacher tries to maintain a belief in the immortality of the soul. But the real basis of the belief in immortality has been abandoned by rejecting the New Testament account of the resurrection of Christ.

Practically, the liberal preacher has very little to say about the other world. This world is really the center of all his thoughts. Religion itself, and even God, are merely the means to better the conditions on this earth.

Thus religion has become a mere function of the community or of the state. That is how it is looked upon by the men of the present day. Even hard-headed business men and politicians have become convinced that religion is needed. But it is thought to be needed merely as a means to an end. We have tried to get along without religion, it is said, but the experiment was a failure. Now religion must be called in to help.

For example, there is the problem of the immigrants. Great populations have found a place in our country. They do not speak our language or know our customs, and we do not know what to do with them. We have attacked them by oppressive legislation or proposed legislation, but such measures have not been entirely effective. Somehow these people display a perverse attachment to the language that they learned at their mother's knee. It may be strange for a man to love the language that he learned at his mother's knee, but these people do love it, and we are perplexed in

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<sup>62</sup> Matt. 5:6.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Pet. 1:8.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Cor. 7:31; 2 Cor. 5:10.

our efforts to produce a unified American people. So religion is called in to help. We are inclined to proceed against the immigrants now with a Bible in one hand and a club in the other, offering them the blessings of liberty. That is what is sometimes meant by "Christian Americanization."

Another puzzling problem is industrial relations. Self-interest has been appealed to. Employers and employees have had the plain commercial advantages of conciliation pointed out to them. But all to no purpose. Class still clashes against class in the destructiveness of industrial warfare. And sometimes false doctrine provides a basis for false practice; the danger of Bolshevism is ever in the air. Here again repressive measures have been tried without avail. Freedom of speech and of the press has been radically curtailed. But repressive legislation seems unable to check the march of ideas. Perhaps, therefore, in these matters also, religion must be invoked.

Still another problem faces the modern world — the problem of international peace. This problem also seemed nearly solved at one time. Self-interest seemed likely to be sufficient. There were many who supposed that the bankers would prevent another European war. But all such hopes were cruelly shattered in 1914, and there is not a whit of evidence that hopes are better founded now than they were then. Here again, therefore, self-interest is insufficient; and religion must be called in to help.

Such considerations have led to a renewed public interest in the subject of religion. Religion is discovered to be a useful thing after all. But the trouble is that in being useful, religion is also being degraded and destroyed. Religion is being regarded more and more as a mere means to a higher end.<sup>65</sup> The change can be detected with special clarity in the way that missionaries commend their cause. Fifty years ago, missionaries made their appeal in the light of eternity. "Millions of men," they were accustomed to say, "are going down to eternal destruction. Jesus is a Savior sufficient for all. Send us out therefore with the message of salvation while there is still time." Some missionaries, thank God, still speak that way. But many missionaries make quite a different appeal. "We are missionaries to India," they say. "Now India is in ferment; Bolshevism is creeping in. Send us to India so that the menace may be checked." Or else they say: "We are missionaries to Japan; Japan will be dominated by militarism unless the principles of Jesus hold sway. Send us to prevent the calamity of war."

The same great change appears in community life. Let us say a new community has been formed. It possesses many things that naturally belong to a well-ordered community. It has a drug-store, a country club, and a school. "But there is one thing," its inhabitants say to themselves, "that is still lacking. We have no church. A church is a recognized and necessary part of every healthy community. We must therefore have a church." And so an expert in community church-building is summoned to take the necessary steps. The persons who speak this way usually have little interest in religion for its own sake. It never occurred to them to enter into the secret place of communion with the holy God. But religion is thought to be necessary for a healthy community, and therefore they are willing to have a church for the sake of the community.

Whatever may be thought of this attitude toward religion, it is perfectly plain that the Christian religion cannot be treated this way. The moment it is, it will cease to be Christian. If one thing is

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<sup>65</sup> For a penetrating criticism of this tendency, especially as it would result in the control of religious education by the community, and for an eloquent advocacy of the opposite view, which makes Christianity an end in itself, see Harold McA. Robinson, "Democracy and Christianity," in *The Christian Educator* Vol. No. 1, for October, 1920, pp. 3-5.

plain, it is that Christianity refuses to be regarded as a mere means to a higher end. Our Lord made that perfectly clear when He said: "If any man comes to me, and does not hate his father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Whatever else those stupendous words may mean, they certainly mean that the relationship to Christ takes precedence of all other relationships. It even takes precedence over the holiest of relationships like those between husband and wife, and parent and child. Those other relationships exist for the sake of Christianity, and not Christianity for their sake. Christianity will indeed accomplish many useful things in this world. But if it is accepted only to accomplish those useful things, it is not Christianity. Christianity will combat Bolshevism. But if it is accepted in order to combat Bolshevism, it is not Christianity: Christianity will produce a unified nation in a slow but satisfactory way. But if it is accepted in order to produce a unified nation, it is not Christianity: Christianity will produce a healthy community. But if it is accepted in order to produce a healthy community, it is not Christianity: Christianity will promote international peace. But if it is accepted in order to promote international peace, it is not Christianity. Our Lord said: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." But if you seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness so that all those other things may be added to you, then you will miss those other things and the Kingdom of God as well.

If Christianity is directed toward another world, and if it is a way to escape from the present evil age to some better country, then what becomes of "the social gospel"? At this point we detect one of the most obvious lines of cleavage between Christianity and the liberal Church. The older evangelism, says the modern liberal preacher, sought to rescue individuals, while the newer evangelism seeks to transform the whole organism of society: the older evangelism was individual; the newer evangelism is social.

This formulation of the issue is not entirely correct, but it contains an element of truth. It is true that historic Christianity is in conflict at many points with the collectivism of the present day. It does emphasize, against the claims of society, the worth of the individual soul. It provides a refuge for the individual from all the fluctuating currents of human opinion. It provides a secret place of meditation where a man can come alone into the presence of God. It gives a man the courage to stand against the world if need be. It resolutely refuses to make the individual a mere means to an end, a mere element in the composition of society. It entirely rejects any means of salvation that deals with men in a mass. It brings the individual face to face with his God. In that sense, it is true that Christianity is individualistic and not social.

Although Christianity is individualistic, it is not only individualistic. It fully provides for the social needs of man.

In the first place, the communion of the individual with God is not really individualistic. It is social. A man is not isolated when he is in communion with God. He can be regarded as isolated only by someone who has forgotten the real existence of the supreme Person. Here again, the line of cleavage between liberalism and Christianity really reduces to a profound difference in the concept of God. Christianity is earnestly theistic; liberalism is half-heartedly so at best. Once a man comes to believe in a personal God, then worshipping Him will not be regarded as selfish isolation, but as the chief end of man.<sup>66</sup> That does not mean, in the Christian view, that the worship of God should ever be carried on to the neglect of service to one's fellow-men. "He that does not love his

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<sup>66</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.1.

brother whom he has seen, is not able to love God whom he has not seen."<sup>67</sup> What it does mean is that the worship of God has a value of its own. The prevailing doctrine of modern liberalism is very different. According to Christian belief, man exists for the sake of God; according to the liberal Church, God exists for the sake of man, in practice if not in theory.

The social element in Christianity is found not only in communion between man and God, but also in communion between man and man. Such communion appears even in institutions which are not specifically Christian.

The most important of such institutions, according to Christian teaching, is the family. And that institution is being pushed more and more into the background. It is being pushed into the background by undue encroachments of the community and of the state. Modern life is tending more and more toward the contraction of the sphere of parental control and parental influence. The choice of schools is being placed under the power of the state. The "community" is seizing hold of recreation and of social activities. It may be a question how far these community activities are responsible for the modern breakdown of the home. Very possibly they are only trying to fill a void which had already appeared apart from them. But the result at any rate is plain — children's lives are no longer surrounded by the loving atmosphere of the Christian home, but by the utilitarianism of the state. A revival of the Christian religion would unquestionably bring a reversal of the process. The family, as opposed to all other social institutions, would come to its rights again.

But the state, even when reduced to its proper limits, has a large place in human life, and it is supported by Christianity in possessing that place. The support, moreover, is independent of the Christian or non-Christian character of the state. It was in the Roman Empire under Nero that Paul said, "The powers that be are ordained of God."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Christianity does not assume a negative attitude toward the state. Instead, it recognizes the necessity of government under existing conditions.

The case is similar with respect to those broad aspects of human life that are associated with industrialism. The "otherworldliness" of Christianity does not involve withdrawal from the battle of this world. Our Lord Himself, with His stupendous mission, lived in the midst of life's throng and press. Plainly, then, the Christian man may not simplify his problem by withdrawing from the business of the world. He must learn to apply Jesus' principles even to the complex problems of modern industrial life. Christian teaching is in full accord with the modern liberal Church at this point. The evangelical Christian is not true to his profession if he leaves his Christianity behind him on Monday morning. The whole of life, including all business and social relations, must be made obedient to the law of love. The Christian man certainly should display no lack of interest in "applied Christianity."

Only — and here an enormous difference of opinion emerges — the Christian man believes that there can be no applied Christianity unless there is "a Christianity to apply."<sup>69</sup> That is where the Christian man differs from the modern liberal. The liberal believes that applied Christianity is all

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<sup>67</sup> 1 John 4:20.

<sup>68</sup> Rom. 13:1.

<sup>69</sup> Francis Shunk Downs, "Christianity and Today," in *Princeton Theological Review*, xx, 1922 p. 287. See also the whole article, *ibid.*,

there is to Christianity. Christianity is merely a way of life. The Christian man believes that applied Christianity is the result of an initial act of God. Thus there is an enormous difference between the modern liberal and the Christian man with reference to human institutions like the community and the state. There is an enormous difference with reference to human efforts at applying the Golden Rule in industrial relationships. The modern liberal is optimistic; the Christian man is pessimistic unless the institutions are manned by Christian men. The modern liberal believes that human nature as constituted at present can be molded by the principles of Jesus. The Christian man believes that evil can only be held in check and not destroyed by human institutions. He believes that there must be a transformation of the human materials before any new building can be produced. This difference is not a mere difference in theory. It makes itself felt everywhere in the practical realm. It is particularly evident on the mission field. The missionary of liberalism seeks to spread the blessings of Christian civilization (whatever that may be), and he is not particularly interested in leading individuals to relinquish their pagan beliefs. The Christian missionary, on the other hand, regards satisfaction with a mere influence of Christian civilization as a hindrance rather than a help. He believes that his chief business is saving souls. Souls are not saved by Jesus' ethical principles, but by His redemptive work. In other words, unlike the apostle of liberalism, the Christian missionary and the Christian worker say to all men: "Human goodness will avail nothing for lost souls; you must be born again."

#### **Chapter 7: "The Church"**

It has just been observed that Christianity, as well as liberalism, is interested in social institutions. But the most important institution has not yet been mentioned — it is the institution of the Church. According to Christian belief, when lost souls are saved, the saved ones become united in the Christian Church. It is only a baseless caricature of Christian missionaries that represents them as having no interest in education, or in maintaining a social life in this world. It is not true that they are interested only in saving individual souls, and once saved, they leave them to their own devices. On the contrary, true Christians everywhere must be united in the brotherhood of the Christian Church.

This Christian concept of brotherhood is very different from the liberal doctrine of the "brotherhood of man." The modern liberal doctrine is that all men everywhere are brothers, no matter what their race or creed. There is a sense in which this doctrine can be accepted by the Christian. The relationship between all men is analogous in some important respects to the relationship of brotherhood. All men have the same Creator and the same nature. The Christian man can accept all that the modern liberal means by the brotherhood of man. But the Christian also knows of a relationship far more intimate than the general relationship of man to man. He reserves the term "brother" for this more intimate relationship. According to Christian teaching, the true brotherhood is the brotherhood of the redeemed.

There is nothing narrow about such teaching, for the Christian brotherhood is open to all without distinction; and the Christian man seeks to bring all men in. Christian service is not limited to the household of faith. All men, whether Christians or not, are our neighbors if they are in need. But if we really love our fellow-men, we shall never be content with binding up their wounds, or pouring on oil and wine, or rendering any such lesser service to them. We shall indeed do such things for them, but the main business of our lives is to bring them to the Savior of their souls.

The Christian founds the hope of society on this brotherhood of twice-born sinners, this brotherhood of the redeemed. He finds no solid hope in improving earthly conditions, or molding

human institutions under the influence of the Golden Rule. These things are indeed welcomed. They may so palliate the symptoms of sin that there may be time to apply the true remedy. They may produce conditions on earth favorable to propagating the gospel message. They are even valuable for their own sake. But in themselves their value to the Christian is certainly small. A solid building cannot be constructed when all the materials are faulty. A blessed society cannot be formed out of men who are still under the curse of sin. Human institutions are really molded by Christian men, not by Christian principles that are accepted by the unsaved. The true transformation of society will come by the influence of those who have been redeemed themselves.

Thus Christianity differs from liberalism in how it conceives of the transformation of society. Both Christians and liberals believe society must be transformed. It is untrue that the Christian evangelist is interested in the salvation of individuals without being interested in the salvation of the race. Even before the salvation of society has been achieved, there is already a society of those who have been saved. That society is the Church. The Church is the highest Christian answer to the social needs of man.

The Church invisible, the true company of the redeemed, finds expression in the companies of Christians who constitute the visible Church to-day. But what is the trouble with the visible Church? What is the reason for its obvious weakness? There are perhaps many causes of weakness. But one cause is perfectly plain — the Church of today has been unfaithful to her Lord by admitting great numbers of non-Christians into her membership and into her teaching agencies. It is inevitable that some who are not truly Christian will find their way into the visible Church. Fallible men cannot discern the heart, and many professions of faith that seem to be genuine may really be false. But it is not this kind of error to which we refer. What is meant is not the admission of individuals whose confessions of faith may not be sincere, but the admission of great numbers of people who have never made an adequate confession of faith at all. Their entire attitude toward the gospel is the very reverse of the Christian attitude. Such people have been admitted not merely to the membership, but to the ministry of the Church. To an increasing extent, they have been allowed to dominate its councils and determine its teaching. The greatest menace to the Christian Church today does not come from the enemies outside, but from the enemies within. It comes from a type of faith and practice within the Church that is anti-Christian to the core.

We are not dealing here with delicate personal questions. We are not presuming to say whether such and such an individual man is a Christian or not. Only God can decide such questions. No man can say with assurance whether the attitude of certain individual "liberals" toward Christ is saving faith or not. But one thing is perfectly plain — whether or not liberals are Christians, it is perfectly clear that liberalism is not Christianity. That being the case, it is highly undesirable to have liberalism and Christianity continue to be propagated within the bounds of the same organization. A separation between the two parties is the crying need of the hour.

Many seek to avoid the separation. Why, they ask, may not brethren dwell together in unity? The Church, we are told, has room both for liberals and conservatives. The conservatives may remain if they keep trifling matters in the background and attend chiefly to "the weightier matters of the law."<sup>70</sup> Among the things designated as "trifling" is recognizing the Cross of Christ as a vicarious atonement for sin.

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<sup>70</sup> Matt. 23:23.

Such obscuration of the issue shows a really astonishing narrowness on the part of the liberal preacher. Narrowness does not consist in a definite devotion to certain convictions, or in a definite rejection of others. The narrow man is the one who rejects another man's convictions without first endeavoring to understand them. He is the one who makes no effort to look at things from the other man's point of view. For example, it is not narrow to reject the Roman Catholic doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. And it is not narrow to try to convince Roman Catholics that the doctrine is wrong. But it would be very narrow to say to a Roman Catholic: "You may hold your doctrine about the Church and I will hold mine, but let us unite in our Christian work. Despite such trifling differences, we agree about the matters concerning the welfare of the soul." Such an utterance would simply beg the question. The Roman Catholic could not possibly hold onto his doctrine of the Church and at the same time reject it, as the program just suggested would require. A Protestant who asked him to do so would be narrow because, regardless who is right about the Church, he would plainly show that he did not make the slightest effort to understand the Roman Catholic point of view.

It is a similar case with the liberal program for unity in the Church. It would never be advocated by anyone who made the slightest effort to understand his opponent's point of view in the controversy. The liberal preacher says to the conservative party in the Church: "Let us unite in the same congregation, because doctrinal differences are trifles." It is the very essence of "conservatism" in the Church to regard doctrinal differences as no mere trifles, but as the matters of supreme moment. A man cannot possibly be an "evangelical" or a "conservative" (or simply a Christian) and regard the Cross of Christ as a trifle. To suppose that he could would be extremely narrow. It is not necessarily "narrow" to reject the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord as the sole means of salvation. It may be very wrong (and we believe that it is), but it is not necessarily narrow. Consider whether a man could hold to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and at the same time belittle that doctrine. It would be very narrow and absurd to suppose he could believe the eternal Son of God really bore the guilt of men's sins on the Cross, and at the same time think that he would regard that belief as a "trifle" that does not affect the welfare of men's souls. We will get nowhere in this controversy unless we make a sincere effort to understand the other man's point of view.

There is another reason why the effort to sink doctrinal differences and unite the Church on a program of Christian service is unsatisfactory. It is unsatisfactory because it is dishonest in its usual contemporary form. Whatever may be thought of Christian doctrine, it can hardly be denied that honesty is one of the "weightier matters of the law." Yet honesty is being relinquished in wholesale fashion by the liberal party in many ecclesiastical bodies today.

One does not need to take sides regarding the doctrinal or historical questions to recognize that fact. Suppose it is true that devotion to a creed is a sign of narrowness or intolerance. Suppose that the Church ought to be founded on devotion to the ideal of Jesus, or on the desire to put His spirit into operation in the world. Suppose it should not be founded at all on a confession of faith with regard to His redeeming work. Even if all this were true, and even if a credal Church was an undesirable thing, it would still remain a fact that many evangelical churches *are* indeed credal churches. A man who does not accept their creed, then, has no right to a place in their teaching ministry. [It would be dishonest for that man to pursue or demand such a place, or for the church to use or retain him in that place, after he has disavowed their creed.]

The credal character of the churches is differently expressed in the different evangelical bodies, but the example of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America may serve to illustrate

what is meant. It is required at the ordination of all officers in the Presbyterian Church, including the ministers, that they answer "plainly" to a series of questions, beginning with the following two:

"Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"

"Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?"

If these "constitutional questions" do not clearly fix the creedal basis of the Presbyterian Church, it is difficult to see what would. Yet immediately after making such a solemn declaration, after declaring that the Westminster Confession contains the system of doctrine taught in infallible Scriptures, many ministers of the Presbyterian Church proceed to decry that same Confession, and the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture to which they have just solemnly subscribed!

We are not speaking of the membership of the Church, but of the ministry. And we are not speaking of the man who is troubled by grave doubts, and wonders whether with his doubts he can honestly continue his membership in the Church. The Church bountifully offers its fellowship and its aid to great hosts of such troubled souls; it would be a crime to cast them out. There are many men of little faith in our troubled times. It is not them that we speak of. God grant that they may obtain comfort and help through the ministrations of the Church!

We are speaking of men who are very different from these men of little faith who are troubled by doubts and earnestly seek the truth. The men whom we mean are not seeking membership in the Church, but a place in the ministry. They do not desire to learn but to teach. They are not men who say, "I believe, help my unbelief."<sup>71</sup> Instead, they are men who are proud in their possession of the knowledge of this world. They seek a place in the ministry so that they may teach what is directly contrary to the Confession of Faith that they subscribed to. Various excuses for that course of action are made — the constitutional questions are supposed to have become a dead letter because of changes in custom; they have various mental reservations, or various "interpretations" of the declaration (which of course mean a complete reversal of the meaning). But no such excuses can change the essential fact. Whether it is desirable or not, the ordination declaration is part of the constitution of the Church. If a man can stand on that platform, then he may be an officer in the Presbyterian Church. If he cannot stand on it, then he has no right to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church. No doubt the case is essentially similar in other evangelical Churches. Whether we like it or not, these Churches are founded on a creed. They are organized to propagate a message. If a man desires to combat that message instead of propagating it, then he has no right, no matter how false the message may be, to gain advantage for combating it by making a declaration of his faith which, to speak plainly, is not true.

If such a course of action is wrong, another course of action is perfectly open to the man who desires to propagate "liberal Christianity." If he finds that the existing "evangelical" churches are bound to a creed that he does not accept, then he may either unite with some other existing body, or else he may found a new body to suit himself. There are obvious disadvantages in such a course — abandoning church buildings to which one is attached, breaking family traditions, or injuring various emotions. But there is one supreme advantage which far outweighs all such disadvantages. It is the advantage of honesty. The path of honesty in such matters may be rough and thorny, but it can be trod. And it has already been trod — for example, by the Unitarian Church. The Unitarian

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<sup>71</sup> Mark 9:24.

Church is frankly and honestly just the kind of church that the liberal preacher desires. It is a church without an authoritative Bible, without doctrinal requirements, and without a creed.

Honesty, despite all that can be said and done, is not a trifle. It is one of the weightier matters of the law. It has a value of its own, quite independent of consequences. But the consequences of honesty would be acceptable. Here, as elsewhere, honesty would probably prove to be the best policy. By withdrawing from the confessional churches — those founded on a creed derived from Scripture — the liberal preacher would indeed sacrifice the opportunity to obtain control of those confessional churches in hopes of changing their fundamental character. Sacrificing that opportunity would mean that the hope of turning the resources of the evangelical churches into the propagation of liberalism would be gone. But liberalism would certainly not suffer in the end. There would at least be no more need to use equivocal language, no more need to avoid giving offense. The liberal preacher would obtain the full personal respect of his opponents, and the whole discussion would be placed on higher ground. All would be perfectly straightforward and above-board. And if liberalism is true, the mere loss of physical resources would not prevent it from making its way.

At this point, a question may arise. If there ought to be a separation between the liberals and the conservatives in the Church, why should the conservatives not be the ones to withdraw? Certainly it may come to that. If the liberal party really obtains full control of the councils of the Church, then no evangelical Christian can continue to support the Church's work. If a man believes that salvation from sin comes only through the atoning death of Jesus, then he cannot honestly support, by his gifts and by his presence, a propaganda that is intended to produce the opposite impression. To do so would mean the most terrible blood-guilt that is possible to conceive of. If the liberal party, therefore, really obtains control of the Church, evangelical Christians must be prepared to withdraw, no matter what it costs. Our Lord has died for us, and surely we must not deny Him for favor of men. Up to the present time, such a situation has not yet appeared. The creedal basis still stands firm in the constitutions of evangelical churches. And there is a very real reason why it is not the "conservatives" who ought to withdraw. The reason is found in the trust that the churches hold. That trust includes trust funds of the most definite kind. Contrary to what seems to be the prevailing opinion, we venture to regard a trust as a sacred thing. The funds of the evangelical churches are held under a very definite trust. They are committed to the various bodies for the propagation of the gospel as set forth in the Bible and in the confessions of faith. To devote them to any other purpose would be a violation of trust, even though that other purpose might be far more desirable.

It must be admitted that the present situation is anomalous.

Funds dedicated to the propagation of the gospel by godly men and women of previous generations, or given by thoroughly evangelical congregations today, are partly being used in nearly all the churches to propagate what is diametrically opposed to the evangelical faith. Certainly that situation ought not to continue. It is an offense to every thoughtfully honest man, whether he is Christian or not. By remaining in the existing churches, the conservatives are in a fundamentally different position than the liberals. The conservatives are in agreement with the plain constitutions of the churches, while the liberal party maintains itself only by an equivocal subscription to declarations that it does not really believe.

How shall so anomalous a situation be brought to an end? Undoubtedly, the best way would be the voluntary withdrawal of the liberal ministers from those confessional churches whose confessions

they do not accept in the plain historical sense. We have not altogether abandoned hope of such a solution. Our differences with the liberal party in the Church are indeed profound, but with regard to the obligation of simple honesty of speech, some agreement might surely be attained. Certainly the withdrawal of liberal ministers from the creedal churches would be in the interests of harmony and co-operation. Nothing engenders strife so much as forced unity within the same organization between those who fundamentally disagree in the aim.

Is advocating such separation a flagrant instance of intolerance? This objection, often raised, ignores the difference between involuntary and voluntary organizations. Involuntary organizations ought to be tolerant. But voluntary organizations, so far as the fundamental purpose of their existence is concerned, must be intolerant or else cease to exist. The state is an involuntary organization. A man is forced to be a member of it whether he wants to or not. Therefore, it interferes with liberty for the state to prescribe any one type of opinion or any one type of education for its citizens. But within the state, individual citizens who desire to unite for some special purpose should be permitted to do so. Especially in the sphere of religion, the right of individuals to unite lies at the very foundation of our civil and religious liberty. The state does not scrutinize the rightness or wrongness of the religious purpose for which such voluntary religious associations are formed. If it did undertake such scrutiny, all religious liberty would be gone. It merely protects the right of individuals to unite for any religious purpose they may choose.

Among such voluntary associations are the evangelical churches. An evangelical church is composed of a number of persons who agree on a certain message about Christ. They desire to unite to propagate that message, as it is set forth in their creed on the basis of the Bible. No one is forced to unite with this body. Because of this total absence of compulsion, there can be no interference with their liberty in establishing a specific purpose for their association — for example, the propagation of a message. If other people want to form a religious association with some purpose other than the propagation of a message they perfectly free to do so — for example, the purpose of promoting a certain type of life in the world, simply by exhortation and by the inspiration of Jesus' example. But if an organization has the fundamental purpose of propagating a message, and it commits its resources and name to those who oppose the message, then that is not tolerance but dishonesty. It is exactly this course of action that is advocated by those who would allow non-doctrinal religion to be taught in the name of doctrinal churches — churches that are plainly doctrinal both in their constitutions, and in the declarations that they require of every candidate for ordination.

The matter may be made plain by an illustration from secular life. Suppose in a political campaign in America, a Democratic club is formed for the purpose of furthering the cause of the Democratic Party. Suppose there are certain other citizens who oppose the tenets of the Democratic club. In their opposition, they desire to support the Republican Party. What is the honest way for them to accomplish their purpose? Plainly it is to form a Republican club to promote propaganda favoring Republican principles. But suppose, instead of pursuing this simple course of action, the advocates of Republican principles declared their conformity to Democratic principles, thus gaining entrance to the Democratic club. Then they turn its resources into anti-Democratic propaganda. That plan might be ingenious, but would it be honest? This is exactly the plan adopted by advocates of non-doctrinal religion who, by subscribing to a creed, gain access to the teaching ministry of doctrinal or evangelical churches. Let no one be offended by the illustration taken from ordinary life. We are not suggesting for a moment that the Church is no more than a political club. But the fact that

the Church is more than a political club does not mean that in ecclesiastical affairs there is any abrogation of the basic principles of honesty.

The Church may possibly be more honest than a political club, but certainly it ought not to be less honest.

Certainly the essentially creedal character of evangelical churches is firmly fixed. A man may disagree with the Westminster Confession, for example, but he can hardly fail to see what it means. At least he can hardly fail to understand the "system of doctrine" that it teaches. Whatever its faults may be, the Confession is not lacking in definiteness. And certainly a man who solemnly accepts that system of doctrine as his own cannot at the same time be an advocate of a non-doctrinal religion. That would regard the very sum and substance of the Confession, and the very center and core of the Bible on which it is based, a trifling thing. The case is similar in other evangelical churches. The Episcopal Church, whose members might resent the title "evangelical," is clearly founded upon a creed. That creed is plainly contained in the Book of Common Prayer, including the exultant supernaturalism of the New Testament, and the redemption offered by Christ. Every priest must read it in his own name and in the name of the congregation.

Separating naturalistic liberalism from the evangelical churches would no doubt greatly diminish the size of the churches. But Gideon's three hundred were more powerful than the thirty-two thousand that began the march against the Midianites.<sup>72</sup>

Certainly the present situation is fraught with deadly weakness. Christian men have been redeemed from sin by the sacrifice of Christ, without any merit of their own. But every man who has been truly redeemed from sin longs to carry to others the same blessed gospel through which he himself has been saved. The propagation of the gospel is clearly the joy as well as the duty of every Christian man. But how shall the gospel be propagated? The natural answer is that it shall be propagated through the agencies of the Church — boards of missions and the like. Therefore, an obvious duty rests upon the Christian man to contribute to the agencies of the Church. But at this point the perplexity arises. The Christian man discovers to his consternation that the agencies of the Church are propagating not only the gospel as found in the Bible and in the historic creeds, but also a type of religious teaching that at every conceivable point is the diametrical opposite of the gospel. The question naturally arises whether there is any reason to contribute to such agencies at all. Of every dollar contributed to them, perhaps half goes to support true missionaries of the Cross, while the other half goes to support those who are persuading men that the message of the Cross is unnecessary or wrong. If part of our gifts is used to neutralize the other part, then contribution to mission boards is entirely absurd. The question may at least be raised. It should not be answered hastily in a way that is hostile to contributing to mission boards. Perhaps it is better for the gospel to be preached and opposed by the same agencies than not be preached at all. At any rate, the true missionaries of the Cross, even though the mission boards which support them turn out to be bad, must not be allowed to be in need. But the situation, from the point of view of the evangelical Christian, is unsatisfactory. Many Christians try to relieve the situation by "designating" their gifts, instead of allowing them to be distributed by the mission agencies. But at this point one encounters the centralization of power that is going on in the modern Church. Because of that centralization, the designation of gifts is often found to be illusory. If gifts are devoted by the donors to one mission known to be evangelical, that does not always really increase the resources of that mission. The mission boards can simply cut down the proportion assigned to that mission from the

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<sup>72</sup> Judges 6-8.

undesigned funds. The final result is exactly the same as if the gift had not been designated at all.

The existence and necessity of mission boards and the like prevents one obvious solution to the present difficulty in the Church — the solution is local autonomy of the congregation. It might be suggested that each congregation should determine its own confession of faith, or its own program of work. Then each congregation might seem to be responsible only for itself, and might seem to be relieved from the odious task of judging others. But the suggestion is impracticable. Aside from the question whether a purely congregational system of church government is desirable in itself, it is impossible where mission agencies are concerned. Obviously many congregations must unite to be able to support such agencies. The question arises whether evangelical congregations can honestly support agencies that are opposed to the evangelical faith.

The situation cannot be helped by ignoring facts. The plain fact is that liberalism, whether true or false, is no mere "heresy." It does not merely diverge from Christian teaching at isolated points. On the contrary, it proceeds from a totally different root. In its essentials, it constitutes a unitary system of its own. That does not mean that all liberals agree with all its parts, nor that Christians affected by liberal teaching at one point have been affected at all points. There is sometimes a salutary lack of logic that prevents a man's entire faith from being destroyed when he gives up a part of it. The true way to examine a spiritual movement is in its logical relations. Logic is the great dynamic, and the logical implications of any way of thinking will certainly be worked out sooner or later. Taken as a whole, as it actually exists today, naturalistic liberalism is a fairly unitary phenomenon. It tends more and more to eliminate illogical remnants of Christian belief from itself. It differs from Christianity in its view of God, its view of man, the seat of authority, and the way of salvation. And it differs from Christianity not only in its theology, but in the whole of its life.

It is sometimes said that there can be communion in feeling where communion in thinking is gone, a communion of the heart as distinguished from a communion of the head. But with respect to the present controversy, such a distinction certainly does not apply. On the contrary, in reading the books and listening to the sermons of recent liberal teachers, a number of things become apparent. They are so untroubled by the problem of sin, so devoid of all sympathy for guilty humanity, so prone to abuse and ridicule the things dearest to the heart of every Christian man, that one can only confess this: if liberalism is to return into the Christian communion there must be a change of heart as fully as a change of mind. God grant that such a change of heart may come! Meanwhile, the present situation must not be ignored but faced. Christianity is being attacked from within by a movement that is anti-Christian to the core.

What is the duty of Christian men at such a time? What is the duty, in particular, of Christian officers in the Church?

In the first place, they should encourage those who are engaging in the intellectual and spiritual struggle. They should not say that more time should be devoted to propagating Christianity, and less to defending it, at least not in the same sense in which a layman says it. Certainly we should propagate Christianity. Believers should not content themselves with warding off attacks; they should also unfold the full riches of the gospel in an orderly and positive way. But those who call for less defense and more propagation usually mean far more than that. What they really mean is to discourage the whole intellectual defense of the faith. Their words come as a blow in the face of those who are fighting the great battle. As a matter of fact, more time, not less time, should be

devoted to defending the gospel. Indeed, truth cannot be stated clearly without comparing it to error. Thus a large part of the New Testament is polemic. The enunciation of evangelical truth was a response to the errors that had arisen in the churches. So it will always be, considering the fundamental laws of the human mind.

Moreover, the present crisis must be taken into account. There may have been a day when Christianity could be propagated without defense. But such a day is past. At the present time, when the opponents of the gospel are almost in control of our churches, the slightest avoidance of defending the gospel is just sheer unfaithfulness to the Lord. There have been previous great crises in the history of the Church, crises almost comparable to this. One appeared in the second century, when the very life of Christendom was threatened by the Gnostics. Another came in the Middle Ages when the gospel of God's grace seemed forgotten. In such times of crisis, God has always saved the Church. But He has always saved it by sturdy contenders for the truth, not by theological pacifists.

In the second place, Christian officers in the Church should perform their duty in deciding the qualifications of candidates for the ministry. The question "For Christ or against him?" constantly arises in the examination of candidates for ordination. Attempts are often made to obscure the issue. It is often said: "The candidate will no doubt move in the direction of the truth; let him now be sent out to learn as well as to preach." And so another opponent of the gospel enters the councils of the Church, and another false prophet goes out to encourage sinners to come before the judgment seat of God clad in the miserable rags of their own righteousness. Such action is not really "kind" to the candidate himself. It is never kind to encourage a man to enter into a life of dishonesty. The fact often seems to be forgotten that the evangelical Churches are purely voluntary organizations. No one is required to enter into their service. If a man cannot accept the belief of such churches, there are other ecclesiastical bodies in which he can find a place. The belief of the Presbyterian Church, for example, is plainly set forth in the Confession of Faith. The Church will never afford any warmth of communion, or engage in her work with any real vigor, until her ministers are in whole-hearted agreement with that belief. It is strange how Christians are sometimes willing to relinquish their loyalty to the crucified Lord in the interests of being falsely kind to men.

In the third place, Christian officers in the Church should show their loyalty to Christ in their capacity as members of the individual congregations. The issue often arises in connection with the choice of a pastor. Such and such a man, it is said, is a brilliant preacher. But what is the content of his preaching? Is his preaching full of the gospel of Christ? The answer is often evasive. The preacher in question, it is said, is of good standing in the Church, and he has never denied the doctrines or grace. Therefore, it is urged, he should be called to the pastorate. But shall we be satisfied with such negative assurances? Shall we be satisfied with preachers who merely "do not deny" the Cross of Christ? God grant that such satisfaction may be broken down! The people are perishing under the ministrations of those who "do not deny" the Cross of Christ. Surely something more than that is needed. God send us ministers who will be on fire with the Cross, instead of merely avoiding denial of the Cross. May He send us ministers whose whole life is one burning sacrifice of gratitude to the blessed Savior who loved them and gave Himself for them!

In the fourth place — the most important thing of all — there must be a renewal of Christian education. The rejection of Christianity is due to various causes. But a very potent cause is simple ignorance. In countless cases, Christianity is rejected simply because men do not have the slightest idea what Christianity is. An outstanding fact of recent Church history is the appalling growth of ignorance in the Church. Various causes, no doubt, can be assigned for this lamentable

development. The development is due partly to the general decline of education — at least so far as literature and history are concerned. The present schools are being ruined by the absurd notion that education should follow the line of least resistance, and that something can be "drawn out" of the mind before anything is put in. They are also being ruined by an exaggerated emphasis on methodology at the expense of content, on what is materially useful at the expense of the high spiritual heritage of mankind. These lamentable tendencies are in danger of being made permanent through the sinister extension of state control.

But something more than the general decline in education is needed to account for the special growth of ignorance in the Church. The growth of ignorance in the Church is the logical and inevitable result of the false notion that Christianity is a life and not also a doctrine. If Christianity is not a doctrine, then of course teaching is not necessary to Christianity. But whatever the causes for the growth of ignorance in the Church, the evil must be remedied. It must be remedied primarily by the renewal of Christian education in the family. It must also be remedied by the use of whatever other educational agencies the Church can find. Christian education is the chief business of the hour for every earnest Christian man. Christianity cannot subsist unless men know what Christianity is. The fair and logical thing is to learn what Christianity is from those who are Christians, not from its opponents. That would be the only fair method in any kind of movement. But it is still more appropriate in the case of a movement such as Christianity, which has laid the foundation of all that we hold most dear. Today men have an abundant opportunity to learn what can be said against Christianity. It is only fair that they should also learn something about what is being attacked.

Such measures are needed today. The present is not a time for ease or pleasure, but for earnest and prayerful work. A terrible crisis unquestionably has arisen in the Church. Hosts of those who reject the gospel of Christ are active in the ministry of evangelical churches. Those who are hostile to the very foundations of the faith have gained entrance into the Church by being equivocal in their use of traditional phrases, and by representing differences of opinion as mere differences of interpretation of the Bible.

There are some indications that this cloak of conforming to the past is being thrown off. The real meaning of what has been taking place is now beginning to appear. The Church is now presumed by the liberals to be educated to the point where the shackles of the Bible can openly be cast away, and the doctrine of the Cross of Christ can be relegated to the limbo of discarded subtleties.

Yet there is no room for despair in the Christian life. However, our hopefulness should not be founded on sand. It should be founded solely on the precious promises of God, not a blind ignorance of the danger. In these trying days, laymen as well as ministers should return to the study of the Word of God with new earnestness.

If the Word of God is heeded, the Christian battle will be fought with both love and faithfulness. Party passions and personal animosities will be put away. On the other hand, even angels from heaven will be rejected if they preach a gospel different from the blessed gospel of the Cross. Every man must decide which side he will stand on. God grant that we may decide correctly!

What the immediate future may bring we cannot presume to say. The final result indeed is clear. God has not deserted His Church. He has brought her through even darker hours than those which try our courage now, yet the darkest hour has always come before the dawn. Today we have the entrance of paganism into the Church in the name of Christianity. But in the second century a similar battle was fought and won. From another point of view, modern liberalism is like the

legalism of the middle ages, with its dependence on the merit of man. Another Reformation will come in God's good time.

But meanwhile our souls are tried. We can only try to do our duty in humility and in sole reliance upon the Savior who bought us with His blood. The future is in God's hand, and we do not know the means that He will use to accomplish His will. It may be that the present evangelical churches will face the facts, and regain their integrity while there is still time. If that solution is to be adopted, there is no time to lose because the forces opposed to the gospel are now almost in control. It is possible that the existing churches may be entirely given over to naturalism. If that happens, then men may see that the fundamental needs of the soul must be satisfied outside of the existing churches, not inside. Thus new Christian groups may have to be formed.

Whatever solution there may be, one thing is clear. There must be groups of redeemed men and women somewhere who can gather together humbly in the name of Christ. There they will give thanks to Him for His unspeakable gift, and they will worship the Father through Him. Such groups alone can satisfy the needs of the soul. At the present time, there is one longing of the human heart which is often forgotten — it is the deep, tender longing of the Christian for fellowship with his brethren. It is true that one hears much about Christian unity, harmony, and co-operation. But the union is often a union with the world against the Lord, or at best a forced union of machinery and tyrannical committees. How different is the true unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! Sometimes the longing for Christian fellowship is satisfied. There are congregations, even in the present age of conflict, that are really gathered around the table of the crucified Lord. There are pastors who are pastors indeed. But in many cities such congregations are difficult to find.

Weary with the conflicts of the world, one goes into the Church to seek refreshment for the soul. And what does one find? Alas, too often, one finds only the turmoil of the world. The preacher comes forward, not out of a secret place of meditation and power, not with the authority of God's Word permeating his message, not with human wisdom pushed far into the background by the glory of the Cross, but with human opinions about the social problems of the hour, or easy solutions for the vast problem of sin. Such is the sermon. Then perhaps the service is closed with one of those hymns found in the back part of the hymnals, breathing out the angry passions of 1861. Thus the warfare of the world has entered even into the house of God. Sad indeed is the heart of the man who has come seeking peace.

Is there no refuge from strife? Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life? Is there no place where two or three can gather in Jesus' name, to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race, to forget human pride, to forget the passions of war, to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife, and to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the Cross? If there is such a place, then that is the house of God, and that is the gate of heaven. And from under the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.